

\$5.95

WINTER 1989/90

CALIFORNIA HISTORY

Special Issue: Envisioning California



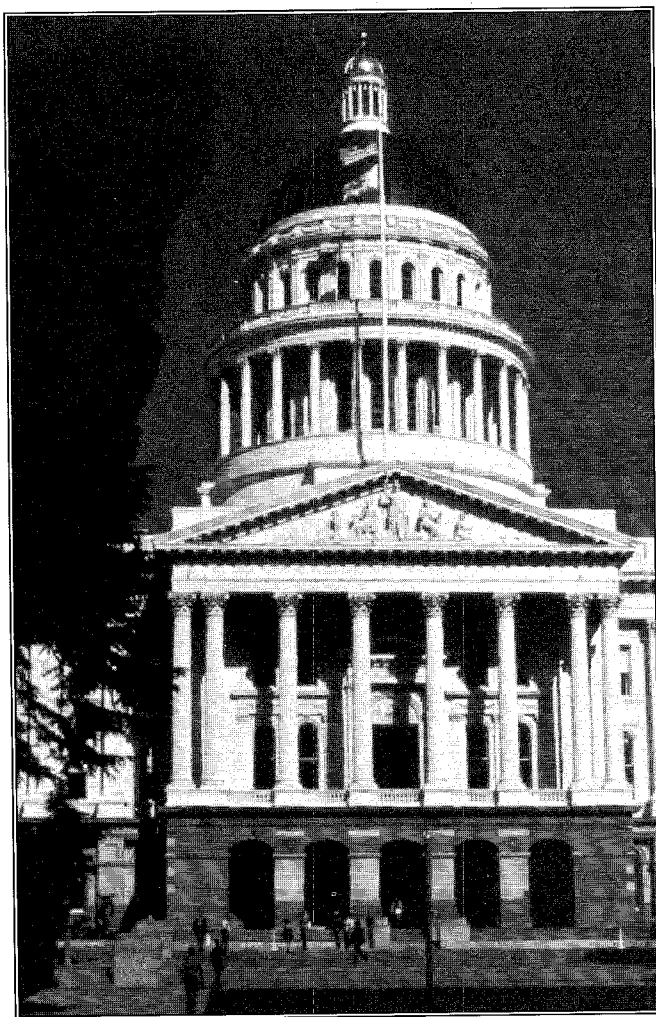
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Milestones in California History—Sacramento's 150th Anniversary



Restored California State Capitol, California. Photographic reproduction courtesy Instructional Media Center, CSU Hayward

The capital city of Sacramento, which in 1989 celebrates the one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of its founding, was the fitting site for the "Envisioning California" conference. In the summer of 1839, the Swiss immigrant John A. Sutter, accompanied by a party of Europeans and Hawaiians, sailed a flotilla upriver from San Francisco Bay and established his wilderness fort at the confluence of the Sacramento and American rivers. Nueva Helvetia—the inland empire he built on the basis of a Mexican land grant and scores of Indian laborers he employed and intimidated—soon became a mecca for arriving settlers. Swamping Sutter's Fort in the late 1840s and early 1850s, hordes of gold-rush squatters wrested control over the

land from Sutter and incorporated the city of Sacramento.

Despite its proximity to the mines, Sacramento was not at first the state capital; the honor shifted frantically in the early years of statehood between San Jose, Vallejo, Sacramento, and Benicia. Not until 1854 did the seat of government settle permanently at Sacramento and the city's future as an interior commercial, manufacturing, and transportation center become secure.

Originally constructed in the 1860s, the present capitol building was restored in the 1970s to its early-twentieth-century Victorian elegance. It now serves as a museum, as well as headquarters for the legislature, governor, and some state agencies.

On The Cover: "Kettleman Plain, Kings County," by Stephen Johnson, 1983.

C THE MAGAZINE OF THE CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY CALIFORNIA HISTORY

VOLUME LXVIII No. 4

Winter 1989/90

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California History is published quarterly by the California Historical Society, 2090 Jackson Street, San Francisco, CA 94109. Second class postage is paid at San Francisco. Postmaster: send address changes to 2090 Jackson Street, San Francisco, CA 94109.
LC 75-640289/ISSN 0612-2897

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California History is published with the cooperation and support of
California State University, Hayward.

I. Introduction

"Envisioning California": AN INTRODUCTION

by Jeff Lustig

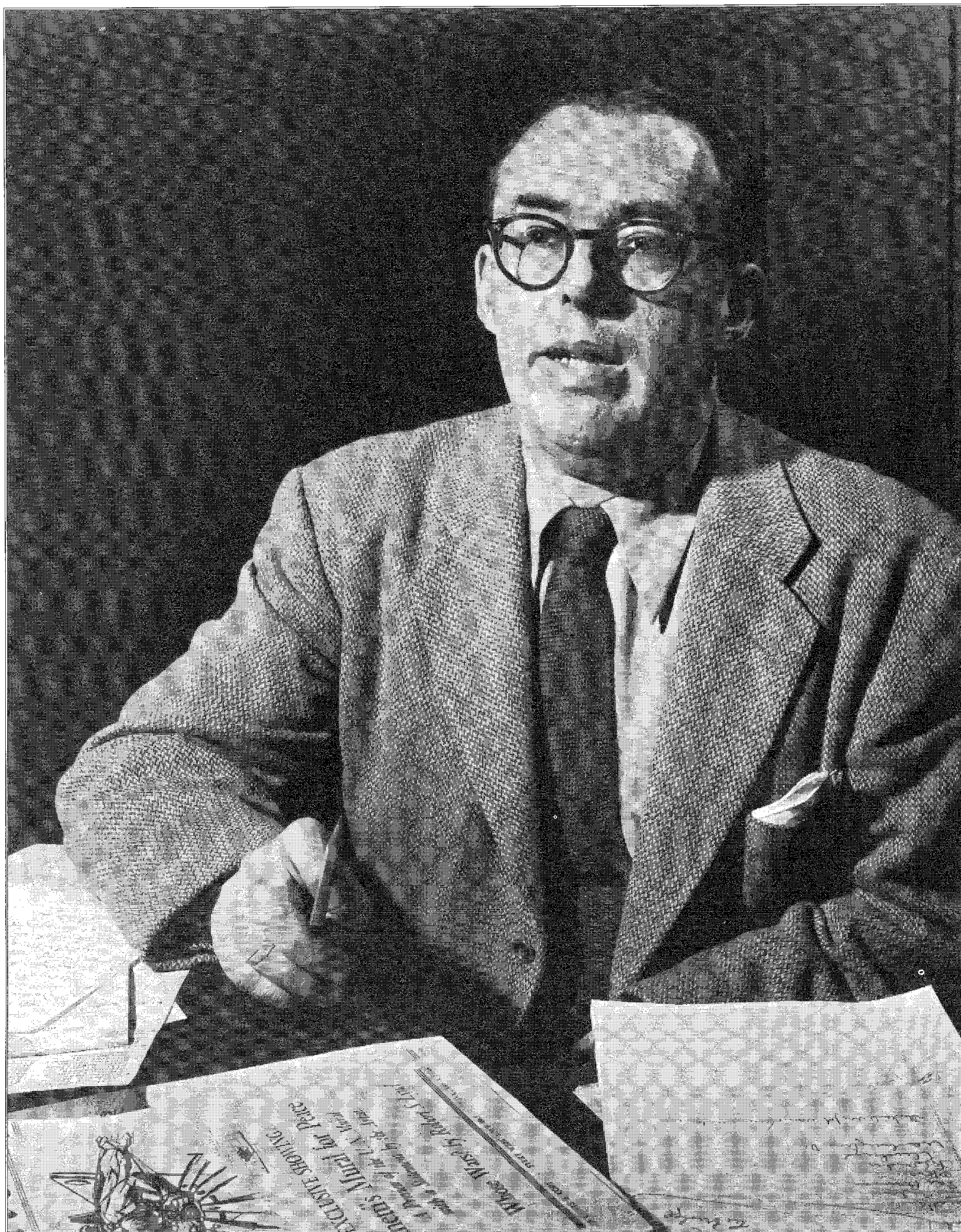
Director, Center for California Studies
California State University, Sacramento

This special issue of *California History* presents selected papers from the "Envisioning California: Peoples, Land and, Policies" conference, the founding gathering of a statewide community of Californians devoted to interdisciplinary inquiry into California's history, policies, and future, and to encouraging the new academic field of California Studies. In February 1989, historians, social scientists, policy-makers, business people, environmentalists, writers, and artists, along with representatives from labor and ethnic groups, met in Sacramento to share their insights and research, compare divergent perspectives, and collaborate in envisioning—in perceiving and trying to understand—California, its master trends and possibilities as a whole.

This conference was called and hosted by the

Center for California Studies, California State University, Sacramento. The California Historical Society provided great support as co-sponsor, as did other organizations, including the California Economic Development Corporation, the University of California's California Policy Seminar, the California State Library, the Walter and Elise Haas Fund, and the Institute of Governmental Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

For all its sunshine and open spaces, California has often proven a difficult place to comprehend. "In the saga of the states," Carey McWilliams noted, "the chapter that is California has long fascinated the credulous and charmed the romantic." The burden of fable stretches as far back as Ordóñez de Montalvo's fixing of our location in 1510 "very near the Terrestrial Paradise" and comes as near as



Carey McWilliams in 1951. Photo courtesy Iris McWilliams

the most recent Hollywood movie. Our geography and natural species conspire to compound the difficulties of perception, dwarfing the human scale, exciting to great deeds and luring to no less grandiose defeats.

But what, beyond the fables and images, *is* California? How do its distinctive regions and rich cultures fit together? What does California *mean*? "Maybe I did have all the aces," remarks one of Joan Didion's characters, "but what was the game?" This in effect was the question that informed the conference and that attendees variously addressed. What are the unifying characteristics, the imminent tasks, the rules, and, as with any game, the *stakes* of life in current California? Such questions arise now not simply because, as noted again by Didion, Californians have always shared a suspicion that "things had better work here, because here . . . is where we run out of continent." The questions arise because of a widespread recognition that California is entering upon a new era. We who have always enjoyed bountiful resources now face depleted stocks, compacted cities, and threatened living standards. The faultlines that vein our society now prove no less disquieting than those that underlie our land, and are just as demanding of serious attention. The questions arise also because California, as McWilliams noted, is a chapter in the saga of the states. It is the lens through which that

nation often glimpses its future. The questions arise, finally, because throughout our regions, and as affirmed in the new interdisciplinary field of California Studies, Californians are clearly developing a new sense of place, a new awareness of the distinctiveness of their state's culture and its claims.


In addition to the selections printed in this issue, people who attended the conference in Sacramento heard speakers address the state's land use, arts, ethnic diversity, history, and economy. To note only a few of the offerings, author James Houston, artist Frank LaPena, and California State University Trustee Claudia Hampton explored California's "Sense of Place"; the general managers of the Metropolitan Water District and the State Water Contractors Association debated critics of state water policy; ex-Senator Pro Tem James Mills joined journalists and historians identifying the distinctiveness of California political institutions; Assemblyman John Vasconcellos evoked a vision of the future; and California writers and poets read from their works.

This first California Studies conference was dedicated to the memory and legacy of Carey McWilliams, the writer/lawyer/social historian and investigative journalist who anticipated by forty years many of the key questions addressed by the conference. In books and articles written over a twenty-year period at the birth of modern Califor-

nia, McWilliams explored the history and hidden histories, sought the deeper meanings, and attempted the larger vision of California. Within a large range of issues, from immigration and farm labor to Japanese American internment, from southern California culture to the environment, we still find ourselves thinking in his metaphors, following in his footsteps, and seeking to live up to his intellectual rigor and democratic sensibilities. (Illustrative of the unexpected fruitfulness of gatherings like these was the gift—suggested at the conference by Carey McWilliams, Jr., and later conferred by Iris McWilliams—to the Center for California Studies and California State University, Sacramento, of the California portion of the late McWilliams' library.)

California's foremost playwright and dramatist, Luis Valdez, opened the conference with a powerful call to common inquiry and common vision. His address appears as the first paper of this issue. When the great book of California public art is written, Valdez's name will surely appear on the first page, as he has pioneered a unique, regionally-rooted theatre, a drama that speaks with a California voice and in a distinctively California institution—El Teatro Campesino. For twenty years Valdez has taught us about ourselves with candor and with wit, and in a drama that affirms as it entertains. It was because we saw in his vision key elements of

our own—for an intellectual life addressed to the varied peoples of the state, for a synthesis of history, literature, politics, and art, and for the creation of an ongoing community of inquiry and dialogue—that we invited Luis Valdez to present the keynote. The truth of the matter, as he affirmed, is surely that “the future belongs to those who can imagine it.”

The Center for California Studies, host of the “Envisioning California” conference, is a public service, public affairs, and applied research office of the California State University devoted to enhancing public understanding of California's history, politics, and cultures in activities like the conference. It undertakes a wide range of programs in fulfillment of its charge, including seminars and colloquia, research publications, curricular resources for courses in California Studies, and administration of the nationally-acclaimed capitol fellows programs. In coming years it will host annual California Studies conferences and bring the resources of the state's largest and most diverse university system to the service of government, public discussion, and civic education. By the time *California History* readers receive this issue, Envisioning California II will have occurred in February 1990 in Sacramento. We hope that many readers will have been able to attend and will continue to join us in building a vital California Studies community. 

II. Envisioning California

Envisioning California

by Luis Valdez

I love the title of this conference because I think it really gets to the heart of the issue. We are examining California as a vision, and that vision evokes the basic question that I've always tried to entertain throughout my life, the question that underlies all the varied professions of our land —*the nature of the human being*. The human being is a creature of habit, the human being is a creature of imagination. Looking for those images, I find a number of specific experiences of California from my life that I would like to share with you.

The year was 1946. I was six years old, walking along a dirt road along the middle of a tomato patch in the Santa Clara Valley, by Moffett Field. Lockheed, I believe, occupies the same acreage now, right by the Bayshore Freeway. There was no Bayshore in 1946. The highway to San Francisco was the El Camino Real. So we were out there, in the middle of nowhere, except for Moffett Field. I was walking along, and there, at my feet, I suddenly spotted a dead rattlesnake. I didn't know at the moment that the snake was dead; it just looked fierce and terrifying. So I tried to cry out to my parents who were a couple of rows down, but no voice came out. I was paralyzed with fear. At that

instant, something caught my eye, and I looked up at the sky. My cry came out as I spotted this huge blimp heading for one of those giant hangars at Moffett Field. Between that moment of silence and the cry, I sensed the depth and breath of my being. I sensed fear and I sensed exhilaration. It couldn't have happened anywhere but in that tomato patch in the Santa Clara Valley in 1946. Moffett Field was a magical place, with airships floating through the sky and landing. Even as a farmworker, as a child, I felt privileged to be in this magic land. That's a unique California experience.

Let's flash forward more than 30 years to another experience of California which didn't even happen in this state. It was in a small apartment across the street from Columbia University in New York City. I rang the doorbell at a very humble apartment to encounter one of the great Californians of our century, Carey McWilliams. This is a man who was and remains one of my heroes, a man who has shaped my vision of the world through his book, *North from Mexico*, which I had read in 1959. And now here I was in 1977, in New York City, about to interview him about his role in the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee back in 1942, in defense of the



Luis Valdez. *Photo courtesy El Teatro Campesino*



In 1981, Universal Pictures released the feature film, "Zoot Suit," written and directed by Luis Valdez and based on true incidents of inter-racial violence in World War II Los Angeles. In this still from the motion picture, the mythical *El Pachuco* (played by Edward James Olmos) is coolly detached, as Della (Rose Portillo) protects Henry (Daniel Valdez), who had been badly beaten during a brawl at Sleepy Lagoon, a reservoir in East Los Angeles. Courtesy Luis Valdez and Universal City Studios, Inc.

Pachucos. Of course, that research led to *Zoot Suit*, the play, and *Zoot Suit*, the movie. He was quite generous and open. We spoke for hours, until his wife Iris came and stopped us, because he was just as fascinated with the subject as I was—the subject of California. But it was getting late in the day.

Flash forward a couple of years. At the time I had talked to McWilliams I had said, "I'm researching for a play that I want to write for the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. We have hopes that maybe some day this can come to New York City." He just smiled. In fact, when we opened on Broadway at the Winter Garden Theater in 1979, he was there. He said, "You know, I thought you were going to make it." It was wonderful. It was wonderful that he was there, and it was wonderful to bring the "Zoot suit" riots and the Pachuco experience and the Chicano vision to New York City.

As you may know, we ran into a critical blank wall, a wall that is the East Coast. One of the first things I did when I got back to San Juan Bautista, where I live with my wife and three kids and the larger family of Teatro Campesino, was that I made

a sign for myself with felt pens. I pinned it up on the wall of my office. The sign contained a single word, and that word was CALIFORNIA. The trip to New York had taught me who I was: yes I was Chicano, yes I was an ex-farmworker, yes I was this, yes I was that. But, above all, I was a Californian. I realized in New York City the uniqueness of my California origin. I decided then, in 1979, that this would become the foundation of a greater exploration of my history, of our history, of our take on reality.

So, I am very happy to be part of this conference because it is all part of the same search: the search for images, the search for visions. Those visions exist as an intrinsic part of the history of this corner of the universe; visions that have emerged from the mind of every single human being that has ever trod this earth.

A lot has been said of the final frontier, of our coming to the West Coast and ending the western migration. I want to submit to you a slight change of direction: that the winning of the west was the losing of the north. The north was a very specific

place for centuries. One of the things you must have, if nothing else, in order to exist is a sense of place; and with a sense of place comes a sense of your own mind. Place exists in reality—in the collective reality of our society and in the visionary reality of your own mind.

I am working on a screenplay that takes place in the twenty-first century. It is science fiction. So I come out of the twenty-first century, and I get the odd impression that I'm stepping back in time, that somehow I am living in the past, and that a lot of the nonsense that swirls around us, a lot of the outmoded beliefs, are really part of the dead skin of the serpent that is being sloughed off, as time propels its way into the future. The things that take us forward, in fact, are our visions. They are what we see.

North and south, east and west—I give you reality. I give you four directions as a sense of place and even as a sense of time. The world, after all, is a spherical place, and there's a

square inside of it, a cube inside it. There are four corners, eight if you will, if you square the cube and go around. There is a sense of direction that humanity must have in order to know where it is. We are all born into a time and place. California is one of those places that, because of its unique position, has been the repository of the westward movement. So, many people, having started somewhere else, come here and declare this their home.

I, like many of you, started here. This is where I opened my eyes. Not in Mexico, but here in California, right here in *el valle*. This place, this valley, is where I took root. *I am not an immigrant*. My parents were born in the United States. I am a native. And so I speak with a native tongue and a sense of native belonging, of having been born in this place.

But I was born in Delano, California, in 1940, and in 1940, Delano was the asshole of the universe. It was bad, let me tell you. There was a white side, and there was a brown side, and a railroad and Highway 99 sliced right down the middle.



Mexican American field workers in the Imperial Valley, ca. 1960. CHS Library, San Francisco

Everybody knew the town was segregated, but no one admitted it. Filipinos and the *chinos* and a few Japanese lived in Chinatown. We lived in that nether region which is also a California phenomenon—the *barrio*. Most of it was Filipino actually; but to this day my parents' idea of an evening out is to go to a Chinese restaurant, because of the Pagoda Restaurant on the west side in Delano, the first restaurant I ever knew. Next to it was the Montecarlo, and so forth. What I didn't know, but soon learned, is that there were 13 whorehouses in Delano; this is in a town of 10,000 people. Somebody was awfully active there—lots of aerobics. It so happens there were a lot of single men, a lot of Filipinos who weren't allowed to marry white women. There were a lot of ugly rumors, and racism on both sides of the fence. What I didn't know then was that the Filipinos were Hispanic, but they looked *chino* to me.

There is another image too that comes from the early days of California, Spanish California at any rate. When they were gathering those parties back in Sonora, Mexico, to come and colonize Alta California, they had to bring whomever they could find, anyone who was willing to come to this far-flung wilderness on the edge of the earth. So who came? *Mestizos*, *mulatos*, *filipinos*, *chinos*, *negroes*, *tercerones* (one thirders), *saltatraces* (the ones who bounce back, the racial retards, the throwbacks). These are the people who settled the early Spanish California pueblos of Los Angeles, San Jose, and San Francisco. San Francisco was settled, among others, by a man called José Tiburcio Vasquez, who came and laid the foundations for the city. A generation later, his son was the Sheriff-Mayor of San Jose, and their adobe stood in the plaza right beside the site of the modern convention center on Market Street. A generation after that Tiburcio Vasquez, José's great-grandson became the last of the California bandits, and the last man to be publicly hanged in California. He died less than two blocks from the adobe of his grandfather, the late Sheriff-Mayor of San Jose.

What happened after 1848? An enormous upheaval, the Gold Rush, which we all know about, the search for El Dorado. As it turns out, that is only a manifestation of something else, of a vision that this land for some reason or another has always inspired in its inhabitants.

Did you know that here, in California, before the Spaniards arrived, was the largest concentration of Native Americans in the continental United States? A quarter of a million Indians lived in the hills and valleys of this fabled land. The Spanish came, but

not in great numbers. When the Americans arrived in 1848, because of the Gold Rush, there were just barely 10,000 Spanish Californians. That's not even a good sized *barrio* these days. Only 10,000 Hispanics (or as I like to say, "High Spanics") were spread over this vast territory.

Part of the *sensation* of California has always been the sensation of vastness, of space . . . and with space, as we now know, comes time. Space/time. That's only one of the axes that we encounter here. In addition to east and west, there is north and south, and if one axis is space and time, the other axis has to be spirit and body, because this has always been a very spiritual place. It has always been flaky. We have always been into moonbeams. "Governor Moonbeam" was unfortunately ahead of his time. But I liked his craziness. Ricardo Flores Magon tried to overthrow Tijuana in 1911, and was arrested in San Diego when he objected to World War I. He was sent to Leavenworth Prison, where he refused to eat. He said as he was dying in 1923: "The revolutionary of one man is always the reactionary of another. The revolutionaries of today become the serious men of tomorrow." Jerry Brown is a revolutionary. He's nuts. That's why he is a revolutionary. He is a man of vision, a man who understands the axes that come to bear on this land: the east and the west and the north and the south, space and time, and spirit and matter. Yes, this is a magical land, and we must be able to see it from all the four corners of creation in order to understand it.

More images from the life of a Californian: Highway 99—an endless stream of cars and trucks on a ribbon of asphalt 900 miles long, the high road to hope, prosperity, and dreams of social progress. That is how they got rid of all the Delano whorehouses. The new Highway 99 came through and *whoosh*. It eliminated a lot of suffering, but it did not change Delano much. That town remained a nasty place for Mexicans to live, especially in the winter. It was always hard until spring, when the only chance to work, to get away as migrant workers, beckoned from distant valleys. So we took to the road on that Highway 99, the endless path to endless wealth.

And yet, I was not always a migrant. I was born in 1940, and we all know what happened December 7, 1941. Not September 7, but December 7, 1941. There were a lot of Japanese American farmers working the San Joaquin Valley in the 1940s. They were doing quite well tilling small pieces of land; they had done a lot to make row crops pro-

ductive. They were showing American agriculture how to grow things like watermelons and cantaloupes and cucumbers, produce that had not been known and seen in this valley. They had the art, the skill, the gift. Naturally, this produced competition, and human beings being what they are, someone took advantage of the historical moment, and all Japanese farms were vacated when their farmers and families were sent to concentration camps in 1942.

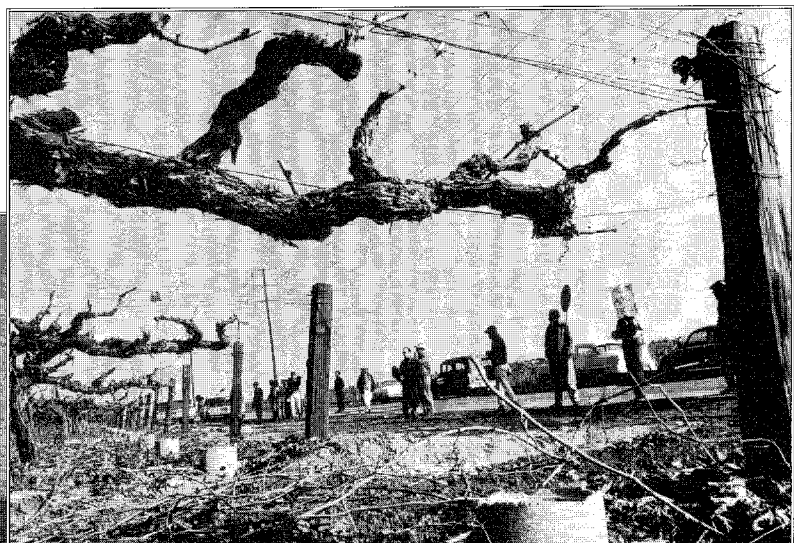
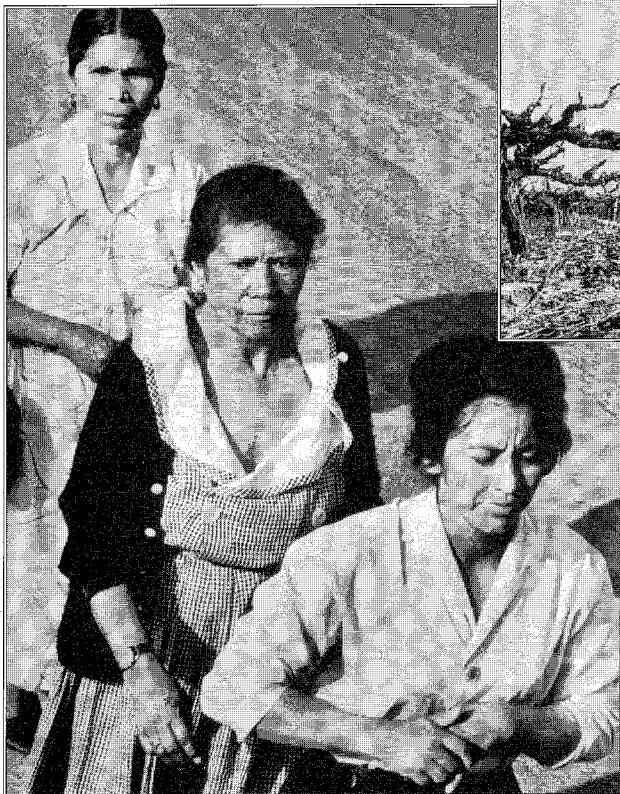
Suddenly the U.S. Army was responsible for hundreds of farms across California. Who was to take charge? They turned them over to the Mexican farmworkers. One of them was my father. They asked him if he would like to run a farm. Well he went for it, and suddenly we were *rancheros*! So World War II was a very prosperous time for my family. We had a "new" car (a 1939-1940, but they did not make new cars during the war). We had food, a house—two houses. We had acreage. My

dad was farming; it was wonderful. The only *patron* we had to deal with was the U.S. Army, which showed up occasionally.

But a strange and tragic thing had happened on our ranch before we got it. The Japanese farmer who had lived on it refused to go to a concentration camp. So he hanged himself in the kitchen. Growing up with my older brother, I would be afraid to go into the kitchen after certain hours. One night our parents were gone. Our cousins were there, and we started telling ghost stories. I could see the farmer hanging from the lamp. So my cousin, who was about 15 at the time, got out the holy water, and she went around blessing the house from corner to corner. "Help us." We were saved.

Then in 1945, a more terrible thing happened. The U.S. won the war. The G.I.s came back, and the Mexican farmers for one reason or another began to lose their farms. So from utter prosperity, my family fell to utter poverty. In 1946 we hit the

During the Delano Grape Strike, strikers and supporters marched three hundred miles up the San Joaquin Valley from Delano to Sacramento to attract public attention to their cause. CHS Library, San Francisco



Protesting workers picket from roadside at a vineyard during the 1969 Delano Grape Strike, a critical turning point in the founding of the United Farm Workers Union and the achievement of collective bargaining for California farm workers. CHS Library, San Francisco

road, and I got to pick those tomatoes next to Moffett Field, and watch the blimps go by. That is a California story.

I did not understand it then. I did not understand the energies of this state. I did not understand, for instance, that Delano has been the focal point of some of the greatest labor struggles in the history of this country and in the history of this century. I was not aware of the residue of social consciousness that existed in Delano. I did not know that for at least another 20 years, until I went back and joined Cesar Chavez and the United Farmworkers, in an effort to try to make some changes happen. *La huelga* led to the Grape Boycott, which led to the first farm labor collective bargaining agreements in U.S. history. Change did happen, but then the Teamsters and the growers got together and the pendulum swung back. All those contracts were lost.

This state will not be able to achieve its greatness until it deals with its gut, until it deals with its agriculture, until it deals with injustice on the land where we grow our food. This is not just a repetition, a warning that comes from the past. This is a warning for the future. The pesticides and other poisons that are seeping into the richest farmland in the world are going to impoverish our grandchildren. It is happening in the Imperial Valley as well. Why is it happening? Because of human intransigence, because of human insensitivity, because one ethnic group believes in the American dream and wants to deny it to another.

We are enmeshed in the future, but we are

entangled in the past. The only way out is for us to get to the very core of the issue. The core of the issue has something to do with the way we view who we are, what we are, where we are, where we are going. This idea of Manifest Destiny—that somehow the only progression that has ever come to California has come from the east to the west—is only half of the vision. There's a progression from the south to the north, and, if you will go back to that little line of nomads coming down twenty thousand years ago across the Bering Strait, from the north to the south. We must cross the "T", we must square the circle, in order to understand who it is we are.

I have gone from east to west, to the north and to the south, across this beautiful state, and I love it, I love the feel of it. I am probably one of the few people who gets high driving on I-5. For a while the question was what to do with all that empty land west of the freeway. That was before they put in the gas stations and motels. Someone suggested that the state legalize gambling and prostitution there, so we could fill it up. Delano again. That is not squaring the circle, that is not locating ourselves. We must know our place geographically and otherwise, and we must know our time.

We must know our position. One of my goals has been to position myself, to posit myself. I am a positive thinker, and it comes from being able to posit myself, place myself. "Give me a place to stand and I shall move California. Give me a place to stand and I shall move America." My entree into America is not so much as an Hispanic, not

In the early 1970s, the new California Aqueduct, lifeline of the California Water Plan for shifting water from northern to southern parts of the state, encouraged subdivision of previously arid lands into water-thirsty farms and orchards down the west side of the San Joaquin Valley. Newly-completed Interstate 5 hugged the foothills of the Coast Range to the west.
Courtesy California Department of Water Resources



anymore, not as a Chicano, not even as a farmworker. Forget it. It is as a CALIFORNIAN, as one of the native Californians who possesses part of the vision that we have all shared for centuries.

There are borders. One of the traditional conflicts in this state has been between north and south. Of course, you must know there were Spanish Californians involved in the creation of the California Constitution, which was based in part on the law that already existed here among the Spanish-speaking peoples. I rush to say these were not Spanish, these were not Chicanos per se; these were *mulatos*, *filipinos*, *chinos*, *indios*, *criollos*. From its very inception, California was a multi-cultural land. It was the destiny of this corner of the world to square the circle. Even so, before too long after the Gold Rush, the state suddenly found itself divided into northern and southern California. Bear Flaggers would accuse the southern *californios* of putting a drag on the development of California as part of the United States, because they wanted to maintain political control. For a while there was talk of secession and of splitting the state into two separate states, northern California and southern California.

We still find that. It affects my work. I put a play on in San Francisco. If it's a success in San Francisco, I have trouble in Los Angeles. If I have a successful Los Angeles play, I have trouble in New York. I do not want to deal with that in my own state. I want to be able to travel. There is a north and a south. But more than ever we are one state. More than ever the north is dependent on the south, and the south is dependent on the north. If for nothing else, then to share a common vision.

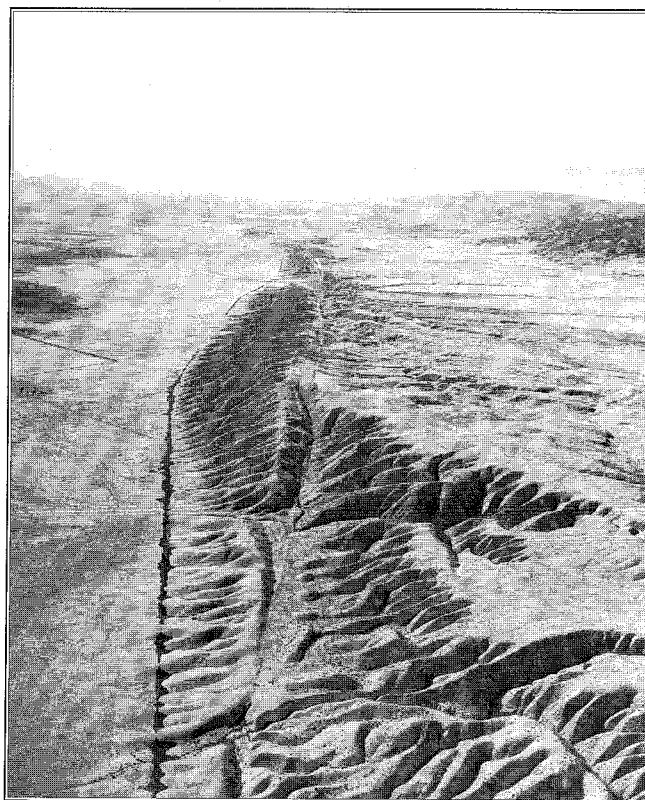
I think one of the most beautiful parts of California is the unpopulated part in the middle. We see the rolling hills, benign and soft, almost poetic in their natural rhythms. This is the faithful California, the California of old. But I am sure I am not the only one driving those freeways; nor are you. Many other kinds of visionaries are driving those freeways, and they see one city from San Francisco to Los Angeles. That too is part of our future; north to south. Will it become that? It depends on what we see.

And, then, as narrow as the state is, there is an east and west, and that is the most important, fascinating part of our California. I could not define it when I was 6, but I knew the moment we packed our belongings into the pickup and headed down Highway 99 and then up to 152 over Pacheco Pass, and came down the hills to Gilroy that we were suddenly in *la costa*, the coast. *La costa* was a magical land. We used to speak of it; our parents used to tell us stories about *la costa*. They used to say, "look to the *duendes*." The *duendes* are our spirits—little

leprechauns, little creative spirits—and maybe it was just a way to keep us picking. But, you know, it worked. Because they were magical, and I was picking up the *duendes* all along and did not even know it. I sensed it in the ecology of *la costa*.

Back in 1946 we did not know the word "ecology" existed. It was "nature" then. We saw it around us in the rivers, in the clumps of live oaks, in California poison oak, and in those hills. The Santa Clara Valley and San Fernando Valley were amazing because they were magical, and they were open, and they were free. Now they're full. I wouldn't keep anybody out of the state, far from it. But I sense the loss, that the newcomers never saw that openness. They never really got a chance to look for the *duendes*, even as children.

What I did not know was that I was looking at a geological phenomenon; that mythical line called the San Andreas Fault, which you encounter just west of Pacheco Pass, is the boundary between two continental plates, the North American plate and the Pacific plate. The Pacific plate rose out of the sea a million years after the North American plate. So the flora and the fauna are new, and



In the Coast Range west of Bakersfield, looking south in 1965 along the San Andreas Fault, border between the Pacific (west) and North American (east) plates that compose the coastline of California. Offset streambeds indicate the northward drift of the Pacific Plate. Many of California's most catastrophic earthquakes, including ones in 1838, 1857, 1865, 1906, 1940, and 1989 have been caused by rupturing of this fault. Courtesy United States Geological Survey

there's a different vibration. It doesn't matter who you are, you pick up on it. That's why we're flaky.

Do you know that studies are still trying to determine what our planet is composed of? Some think that the core is molten iron. Or maybe, there is a giant crystal at the core of the earth. We do not know. We only know that there are still volcanoes—live and active—around the world, that new stretches of land are being created in the sea. And we know this: the fissures and cracks in the earth are not just there to shake us up a bit once in a while, for there are forces rising from the earth, earth forces rising from the very center of the planet. There is around the world, a grid of "T" spots where these fissures in the continental plates have created power spots around the planet. And those that are under the sea are of no help to us unless we eat the fish that swim by there. Those that are on land have given birth to the greatest cities on earth, to great centers of civilization. Why? Because when the earth shakes, what comes up through the earth is not just a sensation of vibration, but vibration itself. Energy! Spirit! You will get the spirit if you think of the earth as a ball of mud, or even a ball of molten iron. By contrast, if you think of earth as something to be covered, that the earth is something to be strapped and chained, you get nothing back.

The history of agriculture has taught us many things. Unfortunately, it has not taught us quickly enough. When Europeans came to America, they discovered a miraculous new system of agriculture. They discovered some very essential things. For instance, the humble potato that I used to pick outside Bakersfield in mid-July. (That was in a place called Fomosa. In 1950, there were headlines that the Red Chinese had invaded *Formosa*. We were picking outside *Fomosa* and I was trying to look to see if we could see any Chinese.) Anyway, the potato took root in the San Joaquin Valley, and a tremendous amount of money was made. I don't know if you know about the potato: the Irish potato, the Idaho potato, the sweet potato. The potato was developed by the Inca. One theory was that it was developed in Machu Picchu on step levels. The Inca bred potatoes that would grow in any kind of weather. The potato is medicinal, the potato is alcoholic, the potato is food; the uses of the potato alone are incredible. One of the things it did was to solve a tremendous problem in northern Europe. Being a vegetable that could grow in cold climates—because it came from the Inca—the potato solved the problem of famine, and it joined the world's food supply and became a natural treasure, along with the gold of America, some of it from California.

As you know, the world's gold supply is limited. We have a great deal of international finance these

days because of the gold in California and Mexico, the silver in South America, and so forth. Interestingly enough, some of the people who mined the gold were Indians here in California. They knew where it was centuries before 1848—many centuries. A new technique was developed here to mine gold. In 1824, there was a sergeant in the Mexican army by the name of José Medina, on his way to the Presidio in San Francisco with a message. He happened to stop in the Santa Clara Valley, and he saw Indians fooling around with red clay. He was a mineralogist, and he knew cinnabar when he saw it. So he took this red clay, and put it into barrels of his shotgun, his *escopeta*, and fired it. Inside the core of the barrel were little drops of quicksilver. If it hadn't been for that quicksilver, the California Gold Rush could not have been what it was. I submit to you that the gold that was gouged out of our hills is today in Fort Knox or the Bank of London or Japan, in major financial capitals of the world. The world's gold supply has not grown. It was taken from the earth, and it was here for thousands of centuries. Why did those Indians not develop some kind of greed here? What's the matter with these backward savages; don't they know gold when they see it? They knew it! They just didn't feel the same way about it. That's part of the crossing of the "T", if you will. We have something to learn from those Indians that we have not yet learned.

There are movements around the world, people moving from east to west, from west to east, from north to south, from south to north. We find ourselves in a dynamic flux today, and California is one of those spots that, like a seismograph, records planetary activity. Why? Because we are squaring the circle here. Because people are here now from all over the world, and they are facing off and looking at each other.

We used to talk about integration. I no longer talk about integration, unless you want to change the metaphor. We must talk about the integrated circuits of society. There is another idea I want to borrow from science that makes a lot more sense to me in terms of what is happening in California. I call it "cultural fusion." The twenty-first-century culture is going to be a product of fusion, as in nuclear "fusion," as opposed to fission. Instead of splitting the cultural atom, we are going to integrate it even more. There is power there, so we must fuse it, make it work for us instead of blowing it apart. Instead of coming into a place and blowing it apart, why not fuse?

I address myself to ancient fears, fears of miscegenation. "What will happen to our kids if they end up looking and being like *them*?" It is a fearful thing that touches every community, but neverthe-

less it is inevitable. Fusion. It is not just a question of dealing with the newly arrived Vietnamese; it is a question of one day *being* Vietnamese. It is not a question that whoever does not speak Spanish learn Spanish; you are already more Spanish than you realize. You have been living here for a long time, and there's more in those tacos than you realize. We know herbs and plants. We absorb, and then we become and we evolve.

An ancient myth sustains my everyday progress into this maddening reality of ours. Ultimately we are all Maya; we are all part of the roots of America. The Maya believed that in that place where the conscious meets with the subconscious—in the navel of the universe—the four heavenly roads converge. The yellow road, the black road, the white road, and the red road. Squaring the circle. They had a symbolic image of God. No name, but an image. A square inside a circle. They called it *hunabku*. That's as close as they ever got to the picture of God; God as a mathematical vector.

I did not know this when I reared my head in Delano. Nobody told me I was a mathematician, I had to find that out for myself. So in my first year of college I married math and physics. I majored

in math and physics. Ultimately, mathematics embraces us all, and it comes back to the question of who we are. We are an unfinished equation that continues to unravel itself. As Lou Diamond Phillips said in *Stand and Deliver* . . . "Cal-coo-loose." There is the calculus of our minds. There is the beat of the universe, as it hums like clockwork and can be described in numbers. There is the magic of the human mind as it perceives and makes sense of its own experience. Sometimes the vision precedes, outlining a road; sometimes the vision emerges from experience. But the vision is always there. And that vision always brings us back to our essential nature as spiritual beings. We are conscious energy. The word "wisdom" comes from the word "vision." It's the same word. In order for California to be wise, it must enlarge its vision to include all humanity.

I leave you with one final thought. The future belongs to those who can imagine it. Thank you. CHS

Founder of El Teatro Campesino in San Juan Bautista, Luis Valdez is an eminent California playwright, director, and filmmaker.



A San Joaquin Valley vineyard under irrigation, ca. 1920. CHS Library, San Francisco



This pamphlet cover, published in 1897 by the California State Board of Trade, ancestor of the present-day California State Chamber of Commerce, testifies to the long-held view of many that California is a special place, an Eden of possibility for human success. *Courtesy Huntington Library*

II. Envisioning California

From El Dorado to the Pacific Rim: The Place Called California

by James D. Houston

These heathen seem to be very well supplied with everything, especially with plenty of fish of all kinds; in fact they brought to the camp so much that it was necessary to tell them not to bring any more, for it would eventually have to spoil.

FRAY JUAN CRESPI
encamped near Santa Barbara
August 20, 1769

When you are trying to locate a place, it is usually safe to begin with maps. I always do. But when the subject is California, you have to be careful. Maps of this region have been deceptive from the start. The earliest ones depicted an offshore island, separated from what is now Nevada by a long narrow channel. Some people say these may be the most reliable maps we have—geographically wrong, but psychologically close to the truth.

On my relief map of North America, the place named California lies along the continent's western rim. A broad valley, shaped like a cucumber, occupies its center. Two great rivers water this valley, fed by a dozen tributaries flowing down from the massive range of high peaks that frame its eastern side. To the west, another range borders the valley, a long pattern of folds and ripples rising

up from the Pacific Ocean. The two great rivers empty into delta lands that channel the water, via a wide gap in the coastal mountains, toward San Francisco's nearly landlocked and marvelously protected bay. To the north there are more mountains, extending toward Canada, though a political line cuts through them to mark where California ends and Oregon begins, just as another political line cuts through the desert that occupies the southern quarter of the state, a desert that extends deep into Mexico.

Is this, then, what we mean by *the place*—this complex system of ridges and waterways, this mosaic of micro-climates and varied terrains? Well, yes. But no. Not exactly. Not when the subject is the state of California. It is now almost impossible to separate the place on the map from the legends that have kept it alive in the imagination. And one would not want to keep them separate for very long. The beguiling attraction of California lives right there, in that interplay. Simply consider the Gold Rush, this region's formative event. How can a few thousand pounds of gleaming metal, no matter how native to the mountainsides and riverbeds, be disentangled from the noise and spectacle of the sudden multitude? Without the gold embedded in the landscape, of course, there would have been no Rush. But without the Rush, we

would have only greed to remember, and bank accounts. No magic. No world-class legend to tickle the memory and stir the blood.

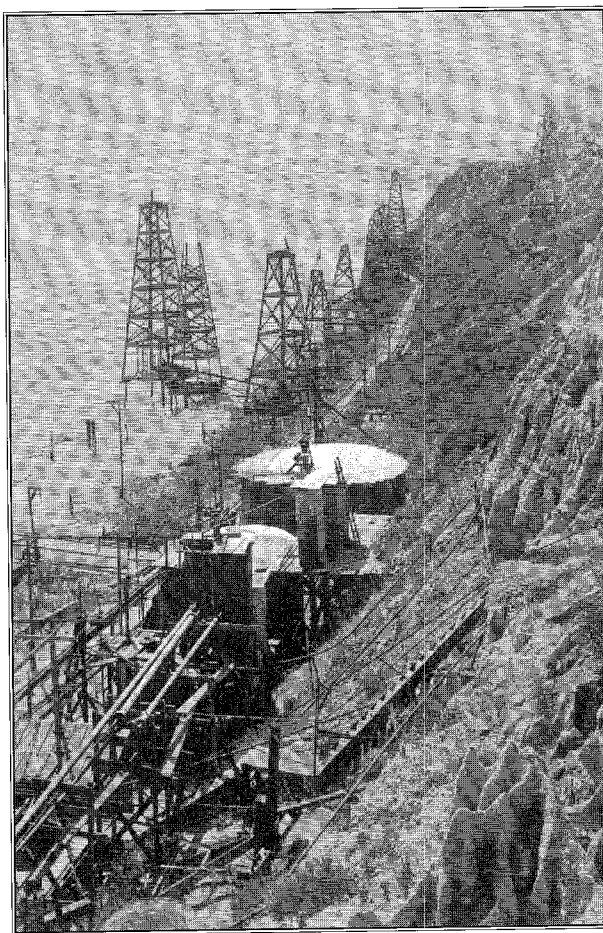
These two—the place on the continent, and the place in the mind—have never been easy to pry apart because the legends actually came first. The dream, the expectation of something remarkable out there at the farthest edge of the New World, lived in the minds of the earliest explorers before they ever glimpsed the monumental headlands at Point Reyes and Point Conception or dipped their hands into the bottomlands of the luscious coastal valleys—San Fernando, Ojai, Salinas, Santa Clara. It was a far western version of El Dorado that originates in a sixteenth-century novel by Garcí Ordóñez de Montalvo called *The Adventures of Esplandián*. There California is named and described for the first time—a science fiction name, in those days, as unearthly as Lilliput or Brobdingnag. It was a mythical island, very near the gates of the Terrestrial Paradise, inhabited by Amazons, made impregnable by steep cliffs and rocky shores, and in this whole island, “there was no metal but gold.”¹

California was not the first place on earth to get this type of advance billing. Explorations of every

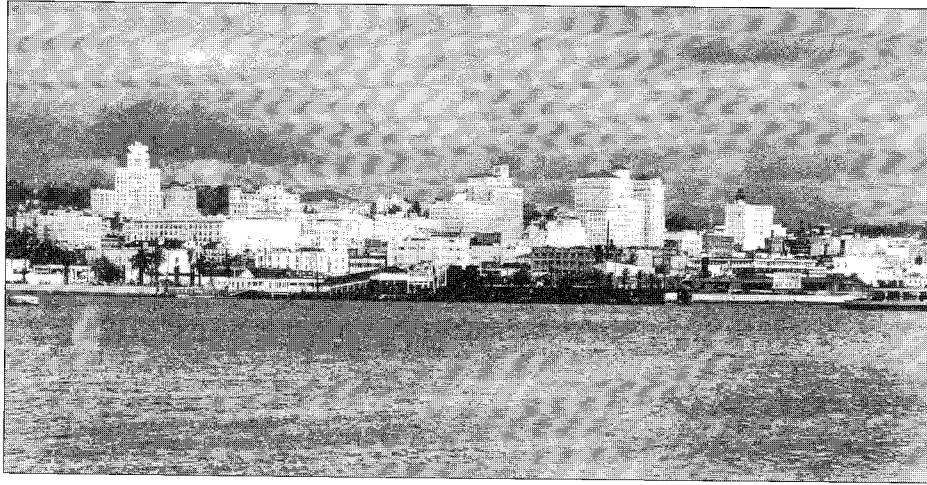
kind have been propelled by heady visions and improbable dreams. An intriguing feature of this region’s history is the extent to which its array of natural endowments—climate, landscape, and bountiful resources—lived up to some of the visions, fleshed out the hopes for a blessed and promised land.

The rich potential of the valleys and alluvial plains was evident to the first overland travelers. “All the soil is black and loamy,” wrote Fray Juan Crespi, chaplain of the Portolá expedition, as they crossed the Los Angeles basin in the summer of 1769, “and is capable of producing every kind of grain and fruit which may be planted.”²

It proved to be ideal for farming and ranching, and for seventy years or so this appeared to be what the earth of California had to offer—extensive grazing lands for cattle, prime acreage for wine grapes and wheat. It was the discovery of gold that brought the boomtown mentality to an otherwise quietly fertile outpost. When this remote western landscape actually delivered pockets and seams of the fabled ore so many adventurers had dreamed about, the world’s imagination suddenly had a new touchstone. Maybe El Dorado existed after all!



Almost as soon as the industry emerged, oil wells invaded the beach at Summerland, Santa Barbara County, shown here in this 1911 photograph. CHS Library, San Francisco



Many generations of Californians have preferred the coastal regions for work, residence, and recreation. San Diego Bay, pictured here on the brink of the post-World War II boom in 1946, has become the home of a great city of more than 1 million people, as well as major naval and port facilities. CHS Library, San Francisco

"On our poor little maps of California printed in France," wrote the journalist Etienne Derbec in 1850, "the San Joaquin is shown as a river flowing between the California mountains and the sea, a short distance from San Francisco, in the midst of a rich plain which its waters cover with gold dust every year. The editors had even taken the pains to gild that precious plain on their maps."³

A few decades later the legend was recharged and reinforced when the landscape delivered up another treasure, dark and sticky, that had been waiting for millenia, locked in subterranean pools and caverns. Fifty or sixty million years ago, when Long Beach was underwater and the central valley was an inland sea, uncountable generations of plankton sifted downward, leaving tiny skeletons to be transmuted into oil. As these ancient deposits were discovered, one by one—the Doheny strike in Los Angeles in 1892, the Lakeview Gusher in the lower San Joaquin in 1910, the phenomenal find at Signal Hill near Long Beach in the early 1920s (in barrels per acre the richest in the world)—fortunes accumulated, both private and corporate, that far surpassed the wealth created by the Mother Lode. The timing, moreover, seems uncanny, because during the same era, while the substrata was releasing its hoard of black gold, California was developing as a world headquarters for the machine that would be a prime consumer: the automobile, with its own by-products, the car culture and the drive-in style of life.

In the early 1980s, seventy years after the Lakeview Gusher darkened the skies above Taft and Maricopa, Kern County alone still ranked 18th among the world's oil-producing regions, delivering more barrels per day than some of the OPEC nations. (And there were more registered vehicles

in California than there were people in the seven nearest western states.)

Meanwhile, another resource, another feature of the place itself, the weather, had fueled three new industries. The first was real estate. From the 1870s onward, land developers packaged the climate, telling easterners that California offered "the loveliest skies, the mildest winters, the most healthful region, in the whole United States."⁴ The second was cinema. Early film-makers, looking for a way to put some distance between themselves and New Jersey, where Thomas Edison was trying to control the patents on film-making equipment, crossed the continent to southern California. They found a number of things that encouraged them to stay, including varied terrain, an abundance of light, and over three hundred clear-sky days in any given year, which made it ideal for outdoor and location shooting.

Hollywood and aviation have at least that much in common. In the early days of flying, pilots and designers also found the southern California climate ideal for testing planes, for taking off and landing. Though the *Spirit of St. Louis* departed from New York in 1927 to make the first trans-Atlantic flight, the plane was designed in San Diego. The demands of World War II gave this fledgling industry size and shape. One thing led to another. Nowadays, in the endlessly sunny deserts north of Los Angeles, while the U.S. Air Force tests its space-age capsules and weaponry, the spirit of aerial adventure lives on in the work of Paul McReady, the aviation renegade who has developed a record-setting series of engineless and human-powered aircraft, the *Gossamer Condor*, the *Gossamer Albatross*, the *Gossamer Penguin*. In 1981 his 198-lb *Solar Challenger* astonished the aviation

world when it crossed the English Channel powered solely by the energy of the sun. The plane was designed in Pasadena. It was systematically tested in the dry clear air above Shafter Airport, a few miles south of Bakersfield.⁵

In this way, time and time again, some feature of the place we call California has led to some new opportunity or perception; and these in turn have advanced the reputation and the legend of the place.

Location itself can be described this way. Simply as a physical creation, the thousand-mile coastline, from Crescent City in the far north, to Point Loma in the far south, is one of the world's most widely praised and often visited beauty zones. Because of its numerous blessings, Californians have hugged this coast from the earliest days of European settlement, spreading out around the long necklace of presidio and port and mission towns founded by the Spanish. This is still where most Californians live, work, and play. Some eighty percent of the state's twenty-six million inhabitants reside within a band about forty miles wide, between Santa Rosa and the Mexican border. They eat fruits and vegetables trucked in from the Central Valley; and their water comes from somewhere farther inland and higher up, sources like Hetch Hetchy and Mono Lake. But they work in San Diego, in the L.A. basin, in the extended megalopolis around San Francisco Bay. And the coastline is their principal recreation zone—the beaches, the tidepools, the several dozen surfing spots, the fishing and sailing in offshore waters, the stirring scenery along Highway One, the drop-off cliffs that launch hang-gliders, the trails and

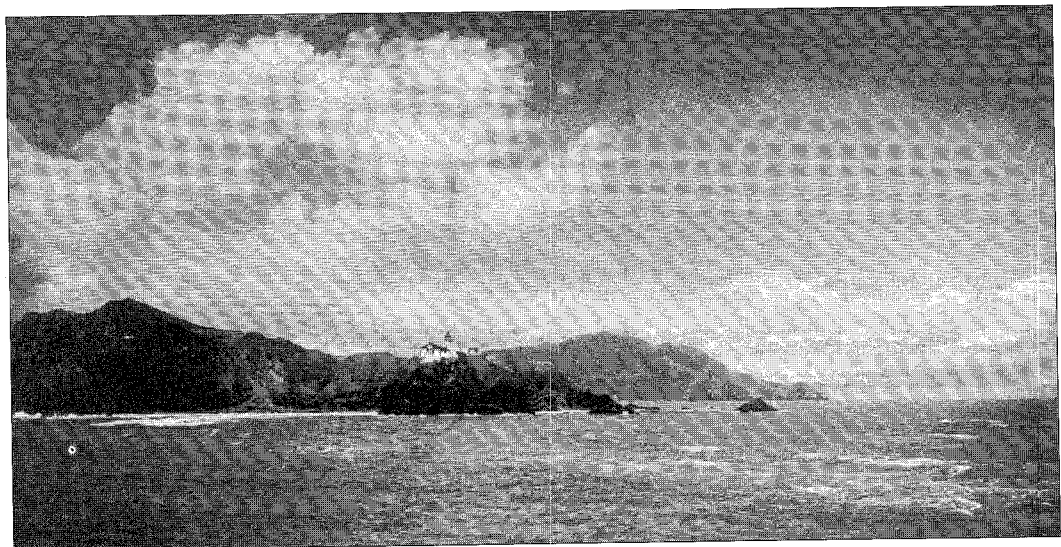
hot springs and campsites throughout the many ridges of the long Coast Range.

Because of its location, this coast that shapes the curving outline of the state has also helped to shape its history. By the late 18th century, Spain, England, Russia, and the United States were all eyeing the strategic advantages of California's as-yet-undeveloped ports and harbors, in their long-distance struggle for control of Pacific trade and trading routes. Today, with control of the Pacific still in mind, some thirty percent of the entire U.S. Naval fleet is based in San Diego.

It is the look of this coastline, as perceived from the East, that has had such a profound effect on what we might call the region's psychological history. Most travellers to California have come from somewhere east. Because of its place in history, because it was settled late and happens to occupy the continent's farthest edge, the West Coast has been viewed as some final stopping place, the end of the trail, the conclusion of that great thrust and opening outward from Europe that began five hundred years ago. No one has voiced this more deliberately and passionately than the Carmel poet Robinson Jeffers. For him, the meeting of shore and water was not only a scene of wild and holy magnificence, it was the cultural cliff-edge, where lives culminate, where cross-continental destinies are somehow completed. This theme propels his early poem, *Continent's End* (1924):

I gazing at the boundaries of granite and spray,
the established sea-marks, felt behind me
Mountain and plain, the immense breadth of the
continent, before me the mass and doubled
stretch of water.⁶

"Continent's
End" at Point
Bonita, Marin
County, in 1912.
CHS Library, San
Francisco



If El Dorado was this region's first large metaphor, Continent's End was the second. And in recent years a third image has risen into public consciousness, as a way of describing California's place on the map and in the mind. It is the term, *Pacific Rim*. A rim, of course, suggests a circle, and the term itself places this state, not at the outer edge of European expansion, but on a great wheel of peoples who surround the Pacific Basin. It helps to bring into sharper focus some of our ever-changing ethnic, cultural, and economic realities.

Because it faces west, this coast is where most trans-Pacific travellers have landed and where immigrants from Asia have settled. Among the people of Asian and Pacific Island background now in the United States, some forty percent live in California. The Asian presence, such a vital feature of this state's unique cultural mix, is much more than a matter of numbers. It is felt in the architecture, in eating habits, in the popularity of certain ideas and belief systems, such as zen and yoga, in the practice of martial arts and healing arts, and in the evolution of the economy. In 1982, for the first time, United States trade with Atlantic nations was surpassed by its trade with nations across the Pacific. In 1986 the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles moved 58.6 million tons of cargo, almost triple the tonnage handled by the ports of New York and New Jersey.⁷

The legends of California are always tied to some feature of its varied and abundant landscape. The oil boom launched by the first major strike in the San Joaquin in 1909 and 1910, for example, had a kind of prologue in the 1906 earthquake. Both episodes begin with underground, innate features of the western earth that have helped to shape both history and mythology. While it wrecked a large piece of San Francisco, the famous quake also flattened the old Russian Orthodox chapel at Fort Ross, seventy miles north, and shook loose a wall of the San Juan Bautista Mission, which we now know stands right in the rift zone, eighty miles south. There had been other fearful quakes in California since settlement began, but this was the one that set a city on fire and first drew widespread attention to something geologists have come to view as a principal feature in the physical life of the place, that six hundred mile crease through the landscape, the San Andreas Fault.

In a similar way the prologue to the Gold Rush is the story of the ill-fated Donner Party, who started too late from the Middle West, fell prey to squabbling along the trail, entered the Sierra Nevada range well past the season when it was considered safe to cross, and thus found themselves trapped in the early winter of 1846. One of the most notori-

ous events in the history of the American West—some say it is the basic event—the Donner tragedy provides an unavoidable counterpoint to the legends of fulfillment and abundance. It is a story not only of seekers pushed past their limits, who devour human flesh in order to survive. It is a story from a region where the weather can turn on you in an hour, where the landscape is no longer an ally or bountiful provider, and where nature is an adversary, or perhaps a mentor you can never afford to take for granted.

The lesson of the Donner Party contains a warning not unlike the warnings of John Muir, the great naturalist and patriarch conservationist who began to tramp the Sierra Nevada range some twenty years later. Be attentive to this land and its habits, he said; learn to enjoy it, but never let down your guard.

The power of the high country so filled Muir with awe and wonder that he devoted his life to preserving as much of this far western landscape as he could. He worked to save Yosemite Valley, and succeeded. He fought harder to save Hetchy Valley, which he claimed was too beautiful to be dammed up and turned into a reservoir, and failed. He founded the Sierra Club, and in his writings he gave voice to an environmental consciousness, a reverence for natural beauty and a respect for the potent and interlocking cycles of the earth, that speaks ever louder as the years go by.

One of the great California ironies is the way its very virtues sometimes seem fated to bring about the state's undoing. This region still draws people at a phenomenal rate, continuing to grow by a thousand or more per day, day after day, year after year, about half by birth and half by in-migration. As the demands on space and resources intensify, one sees examples everywhere of how some cycle of nature is overlooked, or given low priority, in the rush to develop a parcel of real estate, maximize income, or expand a city: in a new subdivision, built across a fault line, half a dozen duplexes are tipped off their foundations by a quake; somewhere along the coast, a fragile slope, over-logged and over-built, is cut away by erosion and four homes go sliding to the bottom; in the lower San Joaquin Valley, over-irrigation coupled with poor drainage fills a hundred thousand acres of cropland with plant-killing salts and minerals, while a spectacular lake in the High Sierra drops fifty feet in fifty years in order to serve a thirsty city three hundred miles south.

The succession of such events, together with the ongoing debates over river use, air quality, the coastal impact of offshore drilling, and so on, are gradually leading us toward a revision of the original California legend. Gradually we are discovering,

or rediscovering, that this land is not a cornucopia of limitless reserves, but a well-endowed place with very specific limits that have to be acknowledged and honored. And these limits, too, are fundamental features of the place—weather, tides, wind and water flow, cycles in the soil and in the earth beneath the soil.

The legend dies hard, however, the one with the boomtown voice saying, "Take what you want while the taking is good." And perhaps we can still learn from the native tribes who once flourished in this part of the world. They understood that in order to survive it was important to find a way to live in harmony with the whole environment. If one failed to do so, the penalty could be severe.

Up along the north coast, the Yurok expressed this via a World Renewal dance, described in Theodora Kroeber's retelling of one of their best-known tales: "To a world in balance, the flat earth's rise and fall, as it floats on Underneath Ocean, is almost imperceptible, and nothing is disturbed by it. Doctors know that to keep this balance, the people must dance the World Renewal dances, bringing their feet down strong and hard on the earth. If they are careless about this, it tips up and if it tips more than a very little, there are strange and terrible misplacements."⁸

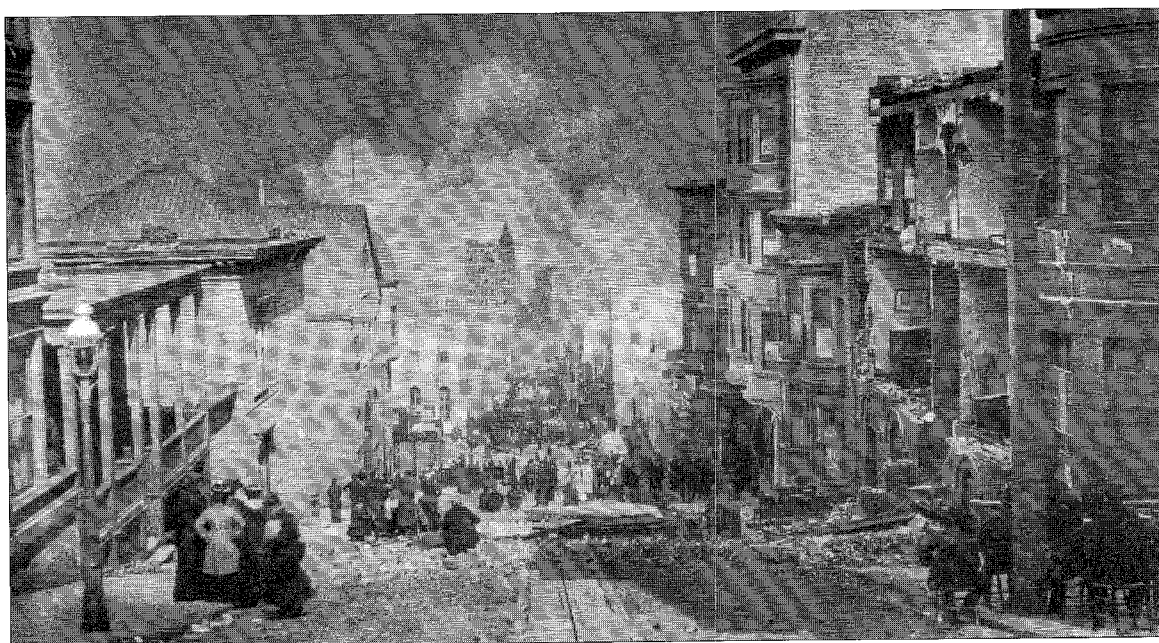
That is a prologue to the story of *The Inland Whale*, who became stranded in a landlocked lake. Why? The people had grown careless. They allowed

the earth to tip too far, so that ocean waters came pouring across the land, carrying all the creatures of the sea. When the earth finally righted itself, and the sea water drained away, a female whale was left behind. Unable to return to her natural habitat, she became a lonely wisdom figure.

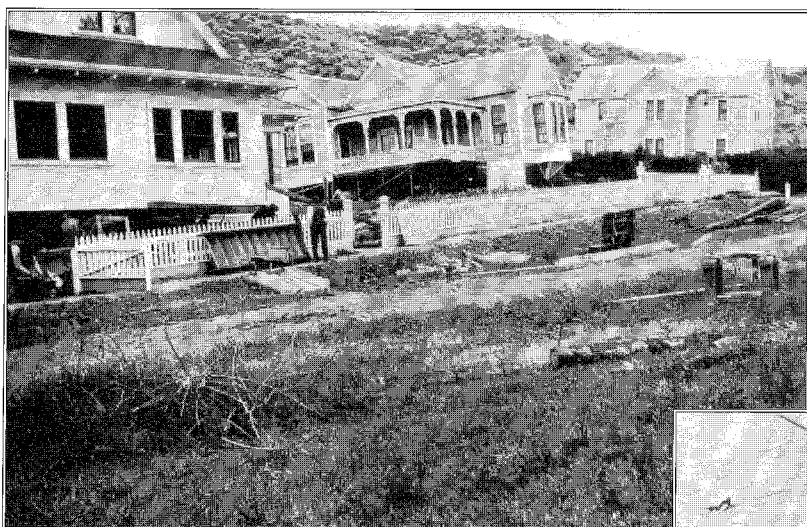
In this ancient story, life is a balancing act, and the earth is a delicately hinged support system one must revere and respect. Evidence suggests that some of the early Spanish explorers saw California this way too. Fray Juan Crespí found the landscape itself to be something one approached respectfully and with more than ordinary caution. As diarist and chaplain with the Portolá party, he was the first writer to give us a detailed account of what this region looked like as European settlement began. Making daily entries as the party crept up the coastline from Baja toward San Francisco Bay, Crespí reported at length on the fauna and the flora, the habits of local tribes, and the habits of the land.

At the end of July 1769 they were camped along the banks of the river we now call the Santa Ana, which follows the Riverside Freeway into Anaheim and Garden Grove. In those days it followed a similar course but had a different name, *el río del dulcísimo nombre de Jesús de los Temblores*. On July 28, the padre wrote:

The bed of the river is well grown with sycamores, alders, willows, and other trees we



Ironical counterpoint to all its physical beauty and its people's material success, California is regularly wracked by devastating earthquakes. This was foreshadowed when Fray Juan Crespí and other Spanish pioneers of the Portolá expedition were terrorized by severe tremors while exploring the coast in 1769. Above is Arnold Genthe's photograph of the fire set off by the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906. This view was taken down Sacramento Street, near Powell, on the morning of the first day of the fire, April 18. CHS Library, San Francisco



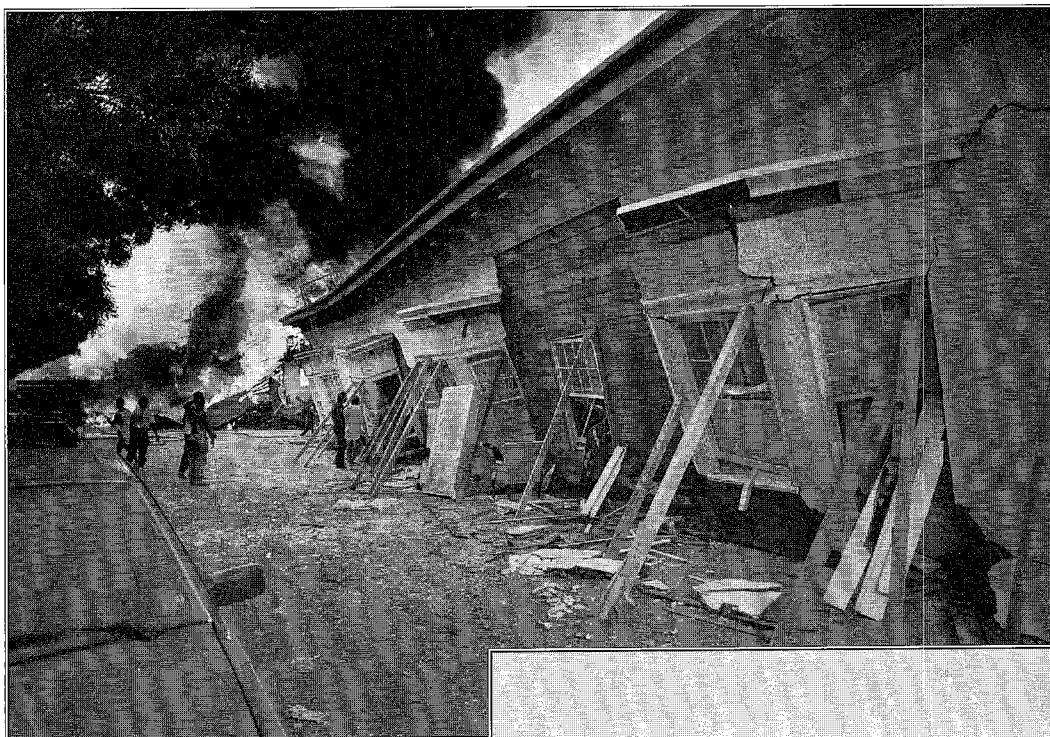
Houses toppled from their foundations, Bolinas, Marin County, April 1906. It is not well known that the great quake caused severe damage outside of San Francisco, particularly in lightly-settled Marin County and down the San Francisco Peninsula to San Jose. *CHS Library, San Francisco*



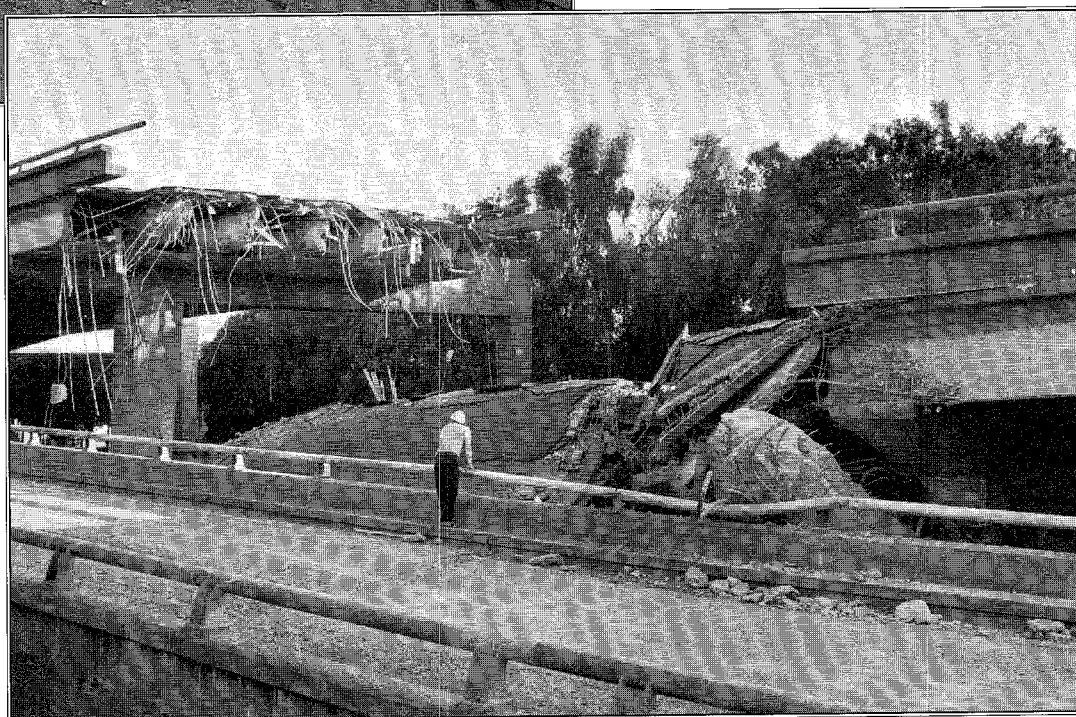
Severe earthquake destruction is no stranger to southern parts of the state. In 1925, a tremor devastated Santa Barbara, causing much of the downtown neighborhood to be levelled. Such disasters often give birth, however, to important social, economic, and cultural changes. In this case, as shown in the photograph, Santa Barbara's nineteenth-century American pioneer buildings were in ruins. City leaders seized upon the opportunity to redevelop the downtown in the Spanish colonial architecture, then very popular in the state, thus giving the city a more distinctive visual identity that lasts to the present day. *CHS Library San Francisco*



Marina District, San Francisco, after the earthquake of October 17, 1989. Photograph by Deanne Fitzmaurice. *Courtesy San Francisco Chronicle*



Marina District, San Francisco, after the earthquake of October 17, 1989. Photograph by Vince Maggiora. Courtesy San Francisco Chronicle



The collapsed Cypress Structure along the Nimitz Freeway, Oakland, after the earthquake of October 17, 1989. Photograph by Steve Ringman. Courtesy San Francisco Chronicle

have not recognized. It is evident from the sand on its banks that in the rainy season it must have great floods which would prevent crossing it. It has a great deal of good land which can easily be irrigated . . . I called this place The Very Sweet Name of Jesus of the Temblors, because we experienced here a horrifying earthquake which was repeated four times during the day. The first, which was the most violent, happened at one in the afternoon, and the last one about four.⁹

Undaunted, the exploration party continued north the next morning, from Santa Ana into what is now the heart of Los Angeles. For the next five days they were periodically shaken by quakes large and small. Though Crespí was alarmed by the tremors, he never failed to comment on the beauties and endowments of the land they passed through, its possibilities for food and shelter, irrigation, timber, and farming. In his diary these concerns, the land's blessings and the unaccountable quivers in the earth, live side by side.

On Tuesday, August 1, they camped just south of where Mission San Gabriel now stands:

At ten in the morning, the earth trembled. The shock was repeated with violence at one in the afternoon, and one hour afterward we experienced another. The soldiers went out this afternoon and brought an antelope, with which animals this country abounds. They are like wild goats, but have horns rather larger than goats. I tasted the meat, and it was not bad.

On Thursday, August 3, the party forded a river they had named for Our Lady of the Angels of Porciuncula (now called the Los Angeles), and Crespí described "a large vineyard of wild grapes and an infinity of rose bushes in full bloom." A few miles later they reach a small stream:

The banks were grassy and covered with fragrant herbs and watercress. The water flowed afterward in a deep channel toward the southwest. All the land that we saw this morning seemed admirable to us. We pitched camp near the water. This afternoon we felt new earthquakes, the continuation of which astonishes us. We judge that in the mountains that run to the west of us there are some volcanoes, for there are many signs on the road which stretches between the Porciuncula River and the Spring of the Alders, for the explorers saw some large marshes of a certain substance like pitch; they were boiling and bubbling, and the pitch came out mixed with an abundance of water . . . and there is such an abundance of it that it would serve to caulk many ships.

Imagine Crespí, born on the Spanish isle of Mallorca, seasoned traveller and soldier of the Cross, marching through the richest land he has yet seen, and struck by subterranean powers such as he has felt nowhere else in New Spain. The dark and loamy soil, where grapes and roses evidently grow wild, is rolling and rumbling beneath his sandals. Ahead of him rise the Santa Monica Mountains, which appear to be volcanic; that is, he *hopes* there are volcanoes up ahead, for that would at least explain the rumbles and the percolating tar pits reported by the scouts.

Crespí has no way of knowing that a rift zone lurks thirty miles to the east. He has no access to the theory of Continental Drift, which some two hundred years later will help account for what is going on. He has no way of knowing that the same forces that created that long crease and these sub-surface tremors—two great slabs of the earth's crust grinding together—also contributed to the scenic grandeur and the miraculously fertile fields. And yet in his diary of 1769, he manages to catch this condition, this pairing. Be wary in the land of promise, his diary suggests. Be attentive, because this appears to be a land of two promises, where abundant possibilities and a potential for disaster live side by side.

When the subject is California, the place on the continent and the place in the mind are now so closely wedded that we may never again be able to separate the two. And yet from time to time one cannot help wondering what this region seemed to offer, in and of itself, before dreams and legends began to shape our view of it. If we can trust what Crespí saw and recorded, during the weeks when the white explorers were arriving, with the roads and the rifles and the high expectations and the first bits of merchandise, this much was already here—grapes and roses and petroleum and fault lines—co-existing in the landscape. CHS

See notes beginning on page 261.

James D. Houston is the author of a dozen works of fiction and non-fiction, including the novels *Love Life* (1985) and *Continental Drift* (1978). Among his non-fiction works are the award-winning *Californians: Searching for the Golden State* (1982), and *Farewell To Manzanar* (1973), both book and teleplay, co-authored with his wife Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston. He is Visiting Professor of Literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

II. Envisioning California

CALIFORNIA: A Visual Artist in Today's Landscape

by Stephen Johnson

Growing up in California gives an artist a significant visual advantage. This is a visually stunning place. Partially because of its remarkable landscape, California has played a unique role in the development of landscape photography as a respected and imitated art form. The California landscape has had dramatic influence on the history of photography and our national attitude toward conservation, parks, and our relationship to the environment in general. Both the majesty of and the threats to California's land have been significant in the development of a growing national environmental ethic.

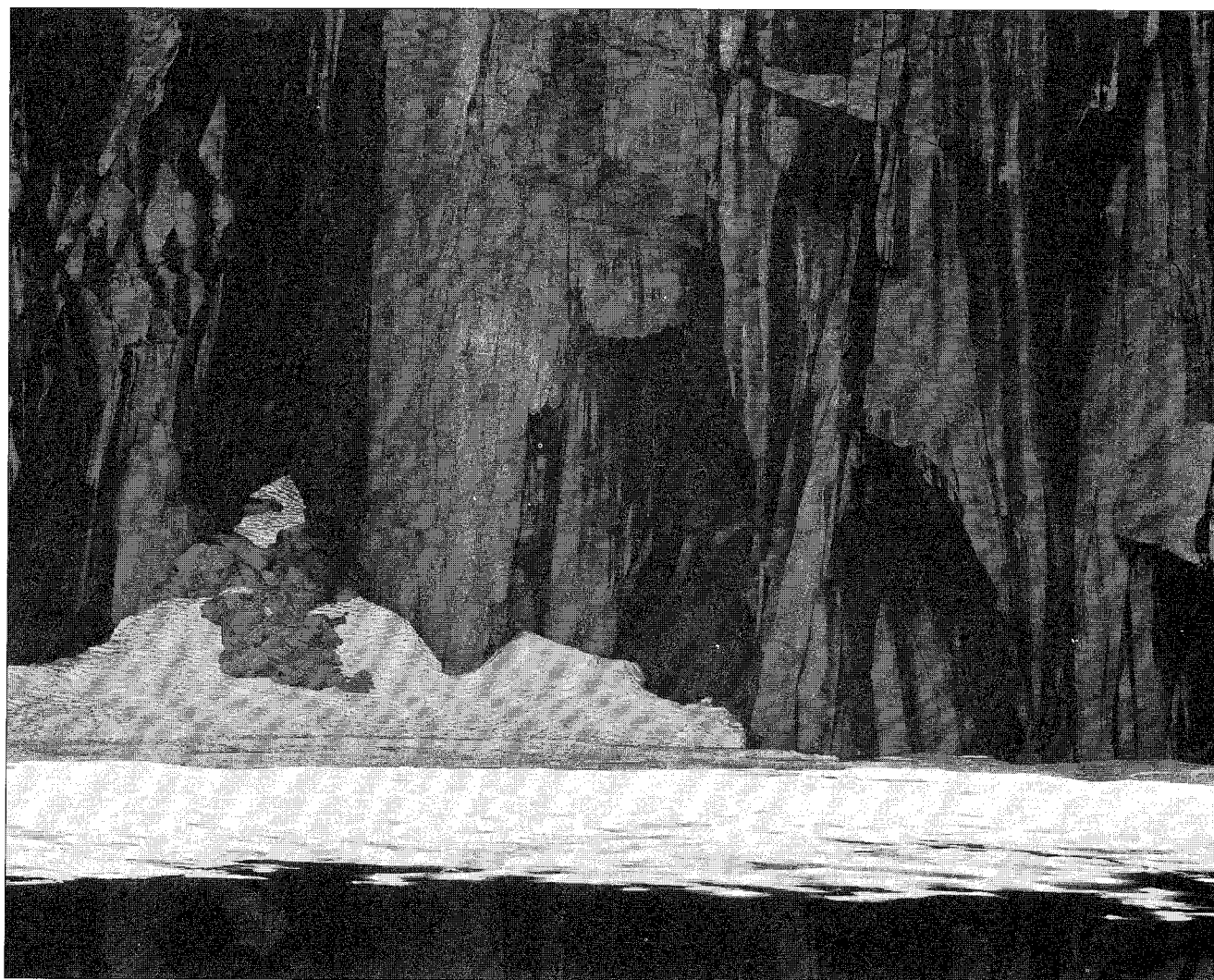
In the nineteenth century, California became the land of gold, the terminus of our westward migration, and possibly the end of our dreams of a limitless frontier. In the 1930s, it was the promised land of milk and honey to a desperately poor, drought-stricken Midwest. Hollywood became a symbol and a dream machine with global implications. More recently, our state has been a magnet for people seeking sunshine and new economic opportunities. For those who stayed elsewhere, our state is still often imagined as some eclectic gathering of surfers attending yoga classes and discussing astrology. Accurate or not, in both positive and negative ways, these views of California have acted as powerful symbols to our nation, and perhaps the world. An underlying theme to this conference is the desire that a more complex and realistic view of California will emerge.

As a visual artist I deal in symbols; my vocabu-

lary is limited to what can be seen, or what can be made to appear to be seen. And as a native Californian, it is easy to succumb to symbolic, exaggerated views of an imagined California. My own homeland pride can easily deteriorate into little more than chamber-of-commerce rhetoric. Our landscape presents itself almost self-elaborated. Overly romanticized descriptions of land can easily happen in a place like California; this land lends itself to overstatement. But the saving grace of this place, of what is perhaps a kind of California state of mind, is that we do, ultimately, confront both our opportunities and problems with some degree of realism, with unique energy and a somewhat naive belief that we can do anything. We are, after all, *Californians*.

Much of California's population is descended from western Europeans who migrated north or west, bringing with them some notion of this land as a source of wealth, not just sustenance. The European immigration seems to have brought a generally consumption-oriented attitude that, from our first penetration here, led to the exploitation of mission Indians, washed away mountainsides in lust for gold, divided the state into railroad-driven land baronies, turned our waterscape upside down, and waged what amounts to chemical warfare on our farmlands.

When photographer Carleton Watkins struggled with his mammoth-glass-plate camera up the steep sides of Yosemite Valley in 1861, I wonder if he had any notion that 27 years later he would be working



"Frozen Lake and Cliffs, the Sierra Nevada," Sequoia National Park, California, 1932, by legendary twentieth-century landscape photographer and environmental activist Ansel Adams. CHS Library, San Francisco. Photograph by Ansel Adams. Courtesy of the Trustees of the Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust. All rights reserved

on a commission for the Kern County Land Company's land promotion schemes near Bakersfield. I wonder if he would have seen any contradiction in the two efforts. I suspect not, because we have been a long time learning to distinguish between being impressed by landscape and re-working it into profit. To the pioneer it was one and the same, a continuum of thought; a new and beautiful place that could make a home was also a place to "work the land." With modern technology and transportation, and no new ethical guidelines to follow, it was still the same: magnificent landscapes where great profits could be made—in gold, lumber, agriculture, and tourism.

It is no coincidence that John Muir and Ansel Adams gained fame here. Nor that placer mining and corporate agriculture rose to such great fame and notoriety. Nor is it surprising that Sacramento Valley farmers brought what may be the first environmental suit when they pressed the state to stop hydraulic mining in the late 1870s.

Early photographers helped to glorify the majesty of this place. And though pictures of Yosemite and the rugged coast could never compete with the images of the Gold Rush, they did have an impact. Watkins' 18x22-inch photographs were circulated in Congress lobbying for passage of the Yosemite Act. In 1864, when Abraham Lincoln signed the

law setting aside Yosemite "for public use, resort and recreation" that would "be inalienable for all time," he made a grand, sweeping gesture that in many ways founded the environmental movement.

It is into this complex context I was born and raised, and eventually settled on the arts as my life's work. My decision was due, in no small proportion, to the beauty of California's Sierra Nevada and Yosemite. But, I now know that it was also due to those days riding my bicycle on the lonely backroads and farmlands of Merced County in the San Joaquin Valley. That long horizon and endless space had as much to do with my development as Yosemite's grandeur.

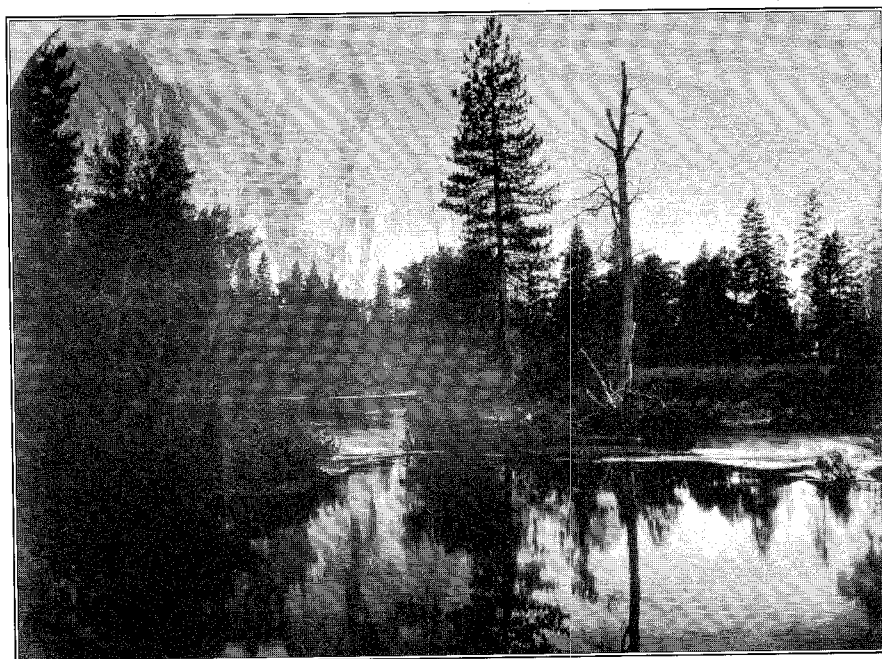
The Central Valley is a peculiar place. We know it is a valley; local car dealerships and newspapers carry the word "Valley" as an icon. But most of the time there are no mountains to be seen, the horizon seems to go on and on without end. And there can't be a valley without mountains. I was sure of it; I read it somewhere.

This strange sense of space breeds an unusual sense of place, and contradictory notions of limits and possibilities. The invisible mountains suggest that things are not always what they seem. The unending space suggests that there are no limits to what we can do, yet it inevitably makes us feel small and isolated. It insulates us from the consequences of our actions and encourages us to try almost anything. And then the sun comes out and

changes everything. What seemed possible in the spring is often unimaginable by August. The summer sun settles all questions. In fact, it settles any desire to ask questions.

With this as my background, it was inevitable that political and environmental considerations would become a part of my decision to pursue art. In California, love for the outdoors often fuses into political activism. There seems to be no other choice. The French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson has been quoted as saying during World War II that he could not understand how Ansel Adams and Edward Weston could be running around California photographing rocks and trees while the world was falling apart. It is somewhat ironic that the seeds sown by California landscape photographers like Adams have so influenced the growth of the environmental movement. Today, this movement, now fully grown, attempts to avert such global disasters as the elimination of rainforests, the greenhouse effect, and chemical/nuclear contamination, threats that are surely as ominous as war.

My own environmental/political crusades as an artist have been somewhat smaller in scope. In 1979 I initiated an effort to build a visual constituency for Mono Lake on the eastern Sierra. Mono Lake is dying because the Los Angeles Depart-



"River View Down the Valley, Cathedral Rock, Yosemite," ca. 1861, by Carleton E. Watkins, first in the line of California's great landscape photographers. Prints such as these aided in persuading Congress and President Lincoln in the 1860s to set aside Yosemite Valley as a scenic land preserve and to grant it to the state of California as caretaker. Historians view the Yosemite grant of 1864 as the origin of the American national park movement. *CHS Library, San Francisco*

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Carleton E. Watkins became associated with Yosemite and landscape views early in his career, as is evident in this advertisement for his studio that appeared in the *San Francisco City Directory*, 1873. CHS Library, San Francisco

ment of Water and Power is exporting water from the Mono Basin. As the lake receives less water, it is shrinking; ultimately its fragile ecosystem will collapse. As a photographer, I wanted to help.

With the help of fellow photographers Al Weber and Don Worth and the support of David Brower at Friends of the Earth, we were able to put together "At Mono Lake," a traveling fine-arts exhibit that toured the country from 1980 to 1983, reaching about two million people. In 1983 we published a book drawn from the exhibit, and I think we made a difference in how Mono Lake is perceived. In many circles, Mono is now a part of a mindset—a beautiful and important landscape being destroyed, that *must* be saved.

I knew at the time that I was merely carrying out a long tradition of photographers' attempting to influence land-use issues. After Carleton Watkins came William Henry Jackson, whose 1872 photographs were used as evidence of the value of Yellowstone when it was under consideration as the first national park. In 1936 Ansel Adams took

his Kings Canyon portfolio to Washington, D.C., to lobby for the creation of a new national park. Such traditions are certainly not unique to California, but it may well be that as technology and ever more intensive land use issues evolve here, artists in this state are in an increasingly unique position, and bear a special responsibility to stand up for endangered lands.

It is interesting to observe how photography is changing from the past emphasis on the idealized western landscape. In contemporary landscape work it is ever more common to deal with how man-made constructions change the landscape, rather than to seek those remaining pristine vistas that become romantic symbols of what once was. In photography, it is clear that the focus is shifting from the ideal to the confrontational. And it is not hard to understand why much of this contemporary work has been done in California. Most of the work is not overtly political, but it functions in and effects the charged political arena of contemporary California culture.

I know that much of this was on our minds when Robert Dawson and I took up photographing the Central Valley in 1982. The effort evolved into a traveling photographic exhibit we couldn't resist calling "The Great Central Valley Project," after the giant federal irrigation project. The book from the exhibit, with a comprehensive text by Gerald Haslam, is being published by the University of California Press in 1990.

When I first returned to the valley to photograph, I was still struggling to understand the place. I remember using dense filters, attempting to cut through the haze and see the mountains. I was still trying to see those mountains, to make this place look like an ideal valley. I was still trying to see the valley for what I thought it was, rather than what it now looked like. For the most part, those photographs were poor and unrevealing. But I kept working, left the filters behind, and the images got better. I began to see the valley as the dynamic, evolving, and troubled landscape that it is. The vast space of the valley and its often ironic human creations became the inspiration for making the photographs as often as did the simple beauty of its rural landscape.

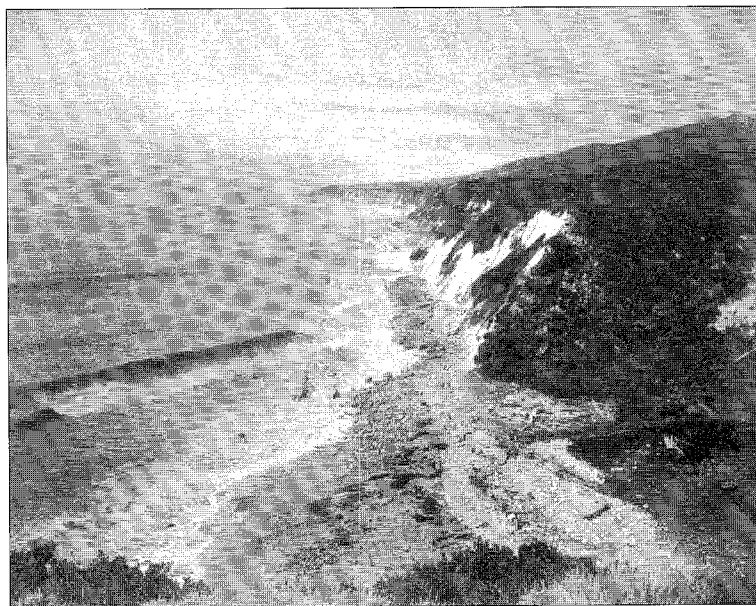
I knew that the Central Valley was a completely re-made land. What I discovered while photographing it was just how dramatic that transforma-

tion has been. Early European explorers most often described the valley as a desolate land of miserable extremes. No doubt, they were seeing the valley through highly prejudiced eyes. Valley Indians certainly did not see their home in such grim terms. In fact, their lives were probably richer and easier than most native Americans. Their population was surprisingly large, perhaps as many as 160,000 people.

The first white settlers viewed technology as the only way of profiting from this land. And they may have been right. Local Indians did not profit from the land, they were merely sustained by it. Therein lies an enormous difference. But now, the very technology that has made the valley bloom with crops may be a source of its undoing. Massive irrigation is salting and polluting the soil. Groundwater pumping is draining and collapsing vital natural aquifers. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides are poisoning the water, and possibly the food supply. Atmospheric pollution probably accounts for billions of dollars in crop losses each year. And we are having an ever more difficult time preserving prime farmland as suburban development pressures push out agriculture.

The arts have a role to play in the stewardship of our land. As artists, it is our job to help take stock of what we have done and to find evidence, inspi-

The coast near Gaviota, Santa Barbara County, ca. 1890, by William Henry Jackson. Although more famous for his views of Yellowstone, Jackson also operated in California. CHS Library, San Francisco





"Mono Lake Storm"
(1979). Photograph by
Stephen Johnson

ration, and metaphor for what appears to be coming. We can have a unique influence on questions of value, maybe not monetary value, but the more fundamental questions of what we draw sustenance from as human beings. Artists are accustomed to finding sustenance in something other than money. We have a good perspective on the subject.

It is unthinkable now, but if it had not been for Frederick Law Olmstead's and Galen Clark's efforts in the early 1860s, our giant Sequoias might have been logged. It may be unthinkable now, but there was a time when discussions were underway to dam the Grand Canyon. And with Glen Canyon now drowned under Lake Powell, there is ample evidence of how rational these developments can be made to sound. It should have been unthinkable to flood Hetch Hetchy Valley. It was certainly irrational to have destroyed Owens Lake at the base of Mt. Whitney, and now to threaten Mono Lake. It is interesting to watch the state's largest

lake, Tulare Lake, reincarnate in particularly wet years, to the extreme frustration of those trying to farm its former lakebed.

It took visionaries to see the danger of sacrificing our land to destructive development. With California's exploding population and growing economic demands, it will take commitment from everyone with a vision of that danger, to battle for that delicate balance between development and conservation. As an artist whose vision was shaped by this landscape, I find the stakes too high, and the opportunities too great, not to try. CHS

Stephen Johnson is a photographer and author. His photographs of Mono Lake and the Central Valley have been the subject of major exhibitions. In 1990, the University of California Press will publish a volume of Central Valley photographs by Johnson and Robert Dawson, with text by Gerald W. Haslam.

III. Literary California

LITERARY CALIFORNIA: "The Ultimate Frontier of the Western World"

by Gerald Haslam

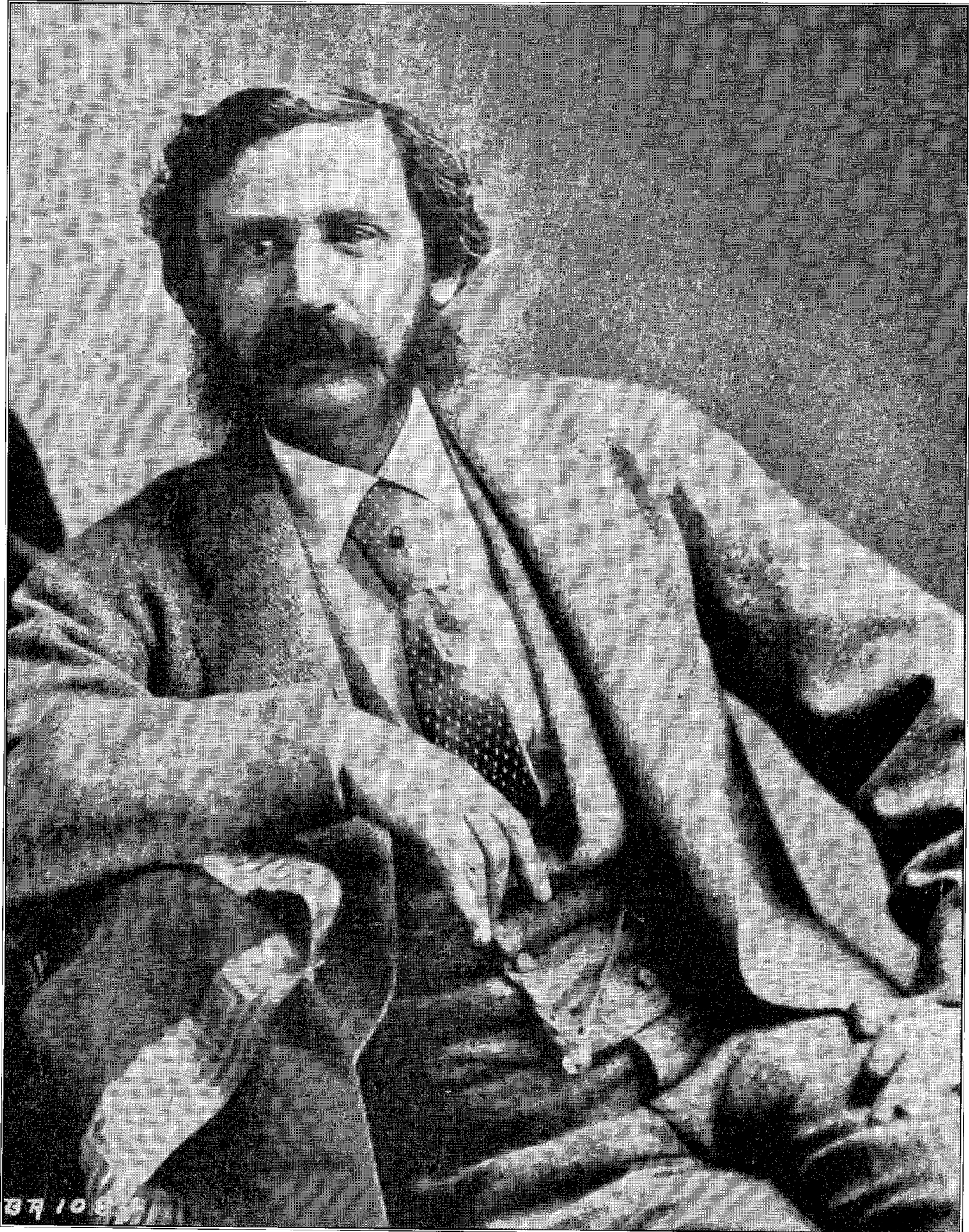
British journalist Michael Davie states the situation unambiguously: "... for a hundred years California has been the ultimate frontier of the Western world: the stopping place of man's strange westering urge." One obvious reason this state remains "the ultimate frontier" is that, like the deep Amazon, it is obscure to outsiders, hidden by stereotypes, by illusions, by expectations as high as the Andes.

Unlike the East Coast corridor, whose values have been confused for the nation's, California is relatively free from European yearning. It is a place whose exotic components speak to new forms and new possibilities. Look, for instance, at how many contemporary Californian writers of note are non-white, women, and from working-class backgrounds. Look at how many are wacko.

Ours is a dissident literature because ours is—from the perspective of interior America—a dissident, diverse, sometimes hyperbolic, society. It is interesting, too, that the complaint of outsiders that California is full of nuts is actually an acknowledgment, *via negativa*, of one of this state's most positive characteristics, its tolerance of sometimes humorous individuation: Joaquin Miller swaggering and lying his way through Oakland and London, Mary Austin's "I-Mary" navel gazing in Carmel and Taos, Charles Bukowski's fist clenched around the neck of a bottle or of an opponent in San Pedro and New York.

Moreover, the state's first four major writers were, arguably, Jack London, Robinson Jeffers, John Steinbeck, and William Saroyan—each a maverick, each misunderstood by mainline critics. My own contemporary favorites include William Everson, Floyd Salas, Joan Didion, Luis Valdez, Maxine Hong Kingston, Wallace Stegner, Gary Soto, Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel, and James D. Houston, hardly a homogeneous group. No, in literature as in life, the Golden State remains heterogeneous, a place that has escaped domination by the old world. As Davie observes, "In California, the European traveler cannot fail to be struck by the absence of the political, social, and religious arrangements the rest of America derived from Europe."

European settlement of California is said to have begun in the 1530s when a few Spaniards ventured onto its southern reaches. Nothing those adventurers experienced, however, lived up to the image of California that had already been created by Garcí Rodríguez Ordóñez de Montalvo in a popular Spanish novel, *Las Sergas de Esplandián* (1510): "... there is an island called California ... inhabited by black women without a single man among them and living in the manner of Amazons ... Their arms are all of gold, as is the harness of the wild beasts which, after taming, they ride." Not even Venice Beach lives up to that description—not quite, anyway. The seminal point



Francis Brett Harte (1836-1902). As poet, short story writer, and editor of the important San Francisco magazine, *Overland Monthly*, "Bret" Harte was the state's first writer of note and the founder of the "California school" of regional literature. CHS Library, San Francisco



Jack London (1876-1916), one of the major literary interpreters of what Lucy Hazzard called the "industrial frontier" and perhaps California's most widely-read author.
CHS Library, San Francisco

is that, from the start, expectation has outstripped reality in this state.

Lucy Hazzard, in *The Frontier in American Literature* (1927), argued that American authors had dealt with two developments: a physical frontier, featuring the writing of such as Bret Harte, Dame Shirley, and Mark Twain; and an industrial frontier, seen in the work of such as Frank Norris, Edwin Markham, and Upton Sinclair. Hazzard also asserted that a third frontier was emerging, spiritual pioneering for control of self. California's writing has not only strongly evidenced the first two of Hazzard's stages, it has virtually defined the third.

As a spiritual frontier, California represents the possibility of great reward and great disappointment, of infinite if nebulous enrichment. Little room has existed for middle ground in this land of dreams. It continues as the edge of the known, where America abuts the future. As native son Richard Armour blithely states matters:

So leap with joy, be blithe and gay,
Or weep my friends with sorrow.
What California is today,
The rest will be tomorrow.

Contemporary illusions concerning the Golden State are largely the product of general misunderstanding fostered by mass media that proclaim versions of coastal California's image to be the

state's homogeneous reality. This state is far too complex, far too rich, far too mysterious, to grasp totally or easily explain, and so is its literature. As a result, models can be usefully employed to better comprehend its diverse literary reality. John and LaRee Caughey, for instance, employed a strictly chronological order with no regional references in their classic collection, *California Heritage* (1962). So did W. Storrs Lee in *California, A Literary Chronicle* (1968). Gary Soto in *California Childhood* (1988) employs a tripartite regional division: Northern California, Central Valley, and Southern California. James D. Houston, on the other hand, suggests a more complex model: rural and urban writing viewed as separate categories and examined diachronically and synchronically.

My own model features our geo/literary regions and one exclusively literary realm that have emerged from California writing, each reflecting distinct history and literary outputs. First, the North Coast, extending from Big Sur north toward Oregon, with San Francisco as its core; in no other place did the East more dramatically penetrate and influence the West. Second, the Southland, dominated today by the Los Angeles-San Diego freeway culture; it was until the late nineteenth century called "the cow counties," as wild a west as existed anywhere. What I call Heartland is number three, the state's rural regions, principally the great Central Valley,

although Steinbeck has single-handedly made the Salinas Valley a significant contributor too. The fourth is Wilderness California, another catch-all that includes the state's mountains, deserts, and forests, vast tracts still little settled, if widely used. My fifth section is called Fantasy California—the state as state of mind. Each of these regions has its own history and its own contemporary reality.

The concept of regions should be seen as an acknowledgment of the state's diversity, rather than an iron-clad dictum. As James Houston explains, "California is really a large mosaic of regions, each with its singular identity and microclimate." Those of us who live here recognize that there is more than one California.

It is also worth mentioning that many writers (Soto, Houston, and Lawrence Clark Powell, for instance) are also students of their state's literature. And it is important to note that many authors write from and about more than one of the state's regions: Steinbeck and Everson composed important work about both the North Coast and the Heartland; Gary Snyder's output reflects Wilderness California, as well as the North Coast. More than a few works, I find, seem to rise from the boundaries between regions; in fact, much writing from Fantasy California does just that. Two obvious examples might be Joan Didion's *Play It As It Lays* (Southland-Fantasy) or Robert Roper's *Royo County* (Heartland-Fantasy).

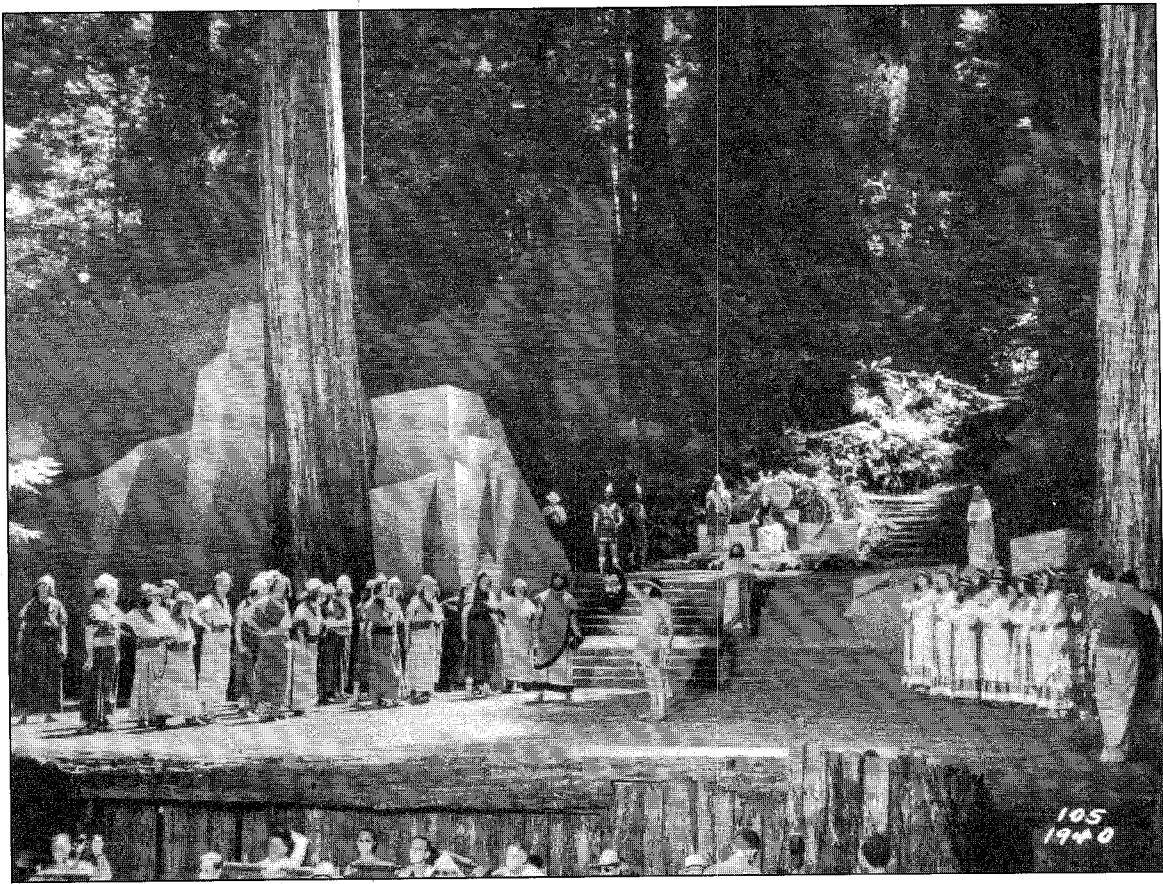
Since I'm tossing out asides and caveats, I also should note that Phillip Rahv's distinction between

"paleface" and "redskin" writers offers an interesting perspective when applied to California. Both are, of course, major factors in our state's literature, but they are different. For instance, Herbert Gold is an acclaimed paleface, an outsider who now dwells here and writes in and about San Francisco, a recognized paleface colony; he can be contrasted with his old friend William Saroyan, raised and blooded in Fresno and very much a redskin. In California, the term "paleface" need not carry pejorative connotations simply because so many of this state's most important resident writers, like the rest of the population, have come from elsewhere—Maya Angelou, Ernest Gaines, Gerald Rosen, Alice Walker, David Bromige, and Ishmael Reed, among many others. Outsiders are frequently insiders here.

A wealth of paleface writers is only one characteristic of the North Coast's literary history. San Francisco Bay allowed the development of a rough-hewn imitation of an eastern seaport, attracting to the region during the late 1840s and 1850s such estimable, if largely forgotten, paleface authors—along with their signal *noms de plum*—as Alonzo Delano (Old Box), George Horatio Derby (John Phoenix), Louisa Smith Clappe (Dame Shirley), and John Rollin Ridge (Yellow Bird). The following decade—San Francisco was by 1860 the fourteenth-largest city in the Union—saw the development of a national literary reputation by writers operating in the San Francisco area. The Golden Gate Trinity (Bret Harte, Ina Coolbrith, and Charles Warren



Ina Coolbrith (1841-1928), California's first poet laureate. In the 1860s she became part of the remarkable circle of writers associated with the *Overland Monthly* that included Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Joaquin Miller, and Charles Warren Stoddard. Later, as librarian for the Oakland Public Library, Coolbrith served as mentor for the young Jack London. CHS Library, San Francisco



Dramatic performance at the annual Summer Encampment of the Bohemian Club at Bohemian Grove in Sonoma County, 1940. Photograph by Gabriel Moulin. Courtesy Moulin Studios

Stoddard, the three editors of *The Overland Monthly*) and their partner Mark Twain marked a high point in western American literature. Most important, perhaps, artists of the time reflected a distinctness still associated with the region. "They had defined themselves as a people liberated from the Puritan past," explains Kevin Starr, "glorying in an exuberant lust for life."

Throughout the remainder of the century, this region remained a cultural magnet, attracting diverse artists. By the 1870s, the larger North Coast remained frontier, but the Bay Area became a frontier province, complete with its own *avant garde* and an association to encourage it. Founded in 1872, the Bohemian Club assembled many of the most creative men of the period; it was, as Starr observes, "a gathering place for productive personalities . . . through the turn of the century."

Bohemian movements have flourished on the North Coast. Late in the last century, for example, creative people began gathering at Carmel. Some, like Joaquin Miller, were links to the frontier past. Most, however, bespoke a new generation's dynamism: Jack London, Lincoln Steffens, George Ster-

ling, Mary Austin, and a host of lesser-known writers. Visitors included such figures as John Muir, Upton Sinclair, Ina Coolbrith, and Charles Stoddard.

By the early twentieth century, then, this had become one of America's most productive, most controversial literary regions, producing literature not simply reflecting the physical and industrial frontiers identified by Hazzard. It was also the first western area to generate a significant body of writing exploring the spirit and to establish a precedent for the continued examination of that timeless frontier. The North Coast's bohemians, up to and including Jack Kerouac and the Beats, Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters, Richard Brautigan and the Hippies, have been everything from space cadets to geniuses.

The Southland is a desert-turned-city as a result of water piped from elsewhere. Little touched by the Gold Rush, it remained largely Spanish-speaking until 1860; it also harbored a strong movement to split the state to avoid dominance by the economically and culturally advanced north. "At that time," Powell claims, "Los Angeles was the

toughest town in the West, a cesspool of frontier scum."

While hardly a literary enclave like San Francisco, the region did produce an interesting body of writing in the nineteenth century, writing that exemplifies principally the first of Hazzard's three stages. Most intriguing are Richard Henry Dana's early glimpses of Spanish California in *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), a book that views the area as the first American settlers did, from the sea; William Manley's *Death Valley in '49* (1894), which describes a tortuous overland approach; and Horace Bell, referred to by a contemporary as a "black-mailer, murderer, thief, house-burner, snake-hunter, and defamer of the dead," whose *The Reminiscences of a Ranger* (1881) was the first clothbound book to be printed in Los Angeles.

The pivotal work in southern California's literary history was, of course, Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* (1884). Intended to expose the plight of Mission Indians, the book ironically became the major factor in the creation of a romanticized mission past. Judging by the number of people who today claim to *know* the *Ramona* story is true, this appears to be an instance of myth, concocted by promoters and desperate settlers, filling an historical vacuum.

The second of Hazzard's stages, the industrial frontier, did not emerge from Southland writing until the 1930s, but when it did, a powerful new force in American fiction was the product. Although other strong, more conventional approaches to industrialization were produced in the state—books by Markham, Steinbeck, McWilliams, and Sinclair, for example—and although Dashiell Hammett's work in the Bay Area may be said to be a precursor, it was nonetheless in southern California that detective novels became a major mode of examining the effects of urbanization, industrialization, and resultant frustration. James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler, and Ross Macdonald produced novels significant enough to demand serious critical attention, as well as a new sense of the price exacted by obdurate urban reality. As Chandler himself explains, his stories are set in "a world gone wrong where the law was something to manipulate for profit and power."

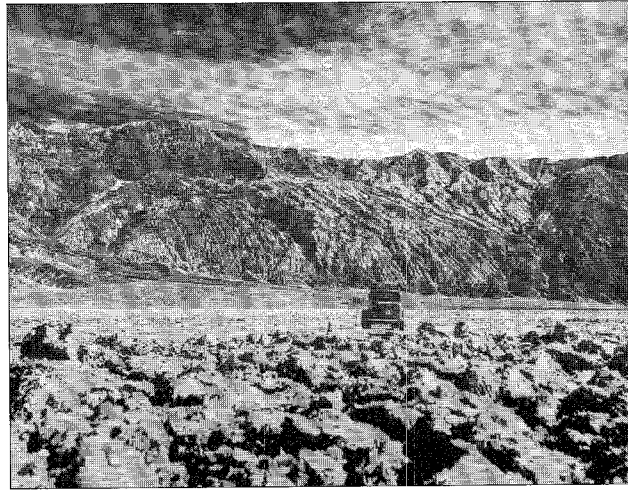
Today, the Southland is a cultural hodgepodge—wild, woolly, unpredictable, and exciting. It is fitting, then, that Bukowski is the region's best known contemporary writer. But there are many others: Kate Braverman, Gerald Locklin, Wanda Coleman, Rafael Zepeda, Mitsyue Yamada, Frank Chin, and M.F.K. Fisher—another varied collection, most of whom would not be caught dead in the waterfront bars that nurtured Bukowski.

Southern California's boundary with Fantasy California is Hollywood, that land of dreams. As Franklin Walker points out, although the nearly 2,000 novels about the movie industry vary greatly, "nearly all agree that the life in the movie colony is artificial, the art meretricious, and the industry the graveyard of talent." Few have complained about the money, however.

The mountains north of Los Angeles constitute another border, for over them can be found the state's principal agricultural realm. Although they boasted virtually no significant literary history prior to the 1930s, California's vast farming stretches, which I lump under the sobriquet Heartland, have become in the past fifty years notable literary regions. The great Central Valley, Heartland's apotheosis, the world's most productive and diverse agricultural region, has attracted an ethnically and socially diverse series of migrants to work in its fields: Chinese, Japanese, Italian, Portuguese,



Helen Hunt Jackson (1830-1885). Although only a brief visitor to the state, "H.H.H."—as she signed her works—was a leader in reforming federal policies regarding former mission Indians through such exposés as *A Century of Dishonor* (1881). Her widely-read novel *Ramona* (1884) is credited with setting in motion the wave of interest in California's Hispanic past that culminated in the restoration of the missions and the popularity of the Spanish Colonial Revival movement in architecture. CHS Library, San Francisco



"The Land of Little Rain,"
Death Valley,
Inyo County, ca.
1940. CHS Library,
San Francisco

Sikh, German, Filipino, Mexican, Okie, and Black—over ninety groups in the Sacramento area alone.

If it appears that the valley has typified the California Dream, however, it is a different dream, for in it virtually the only path to a better life for most emigrants has been hard physical labor, whether on the farms or in the oil fields, on the streets or in the orchards. This is not the California most dreamers have envisioned, so it has tended to attract the tough, the determined, possibly the desperate.

Since the emergence of three Heartland natives, William Saroyan, William Everson, and John Steinbeck, the region has produced a steady stream of innovative literature that defies the state's stereotype. Much of this writing starts with the soil, the physical reality from which so many people wrest their livings. The Salinas Valley division of Heartland, of course, produced Steinbeck, considered by many to be the state's greatest writer. Just as hard urban realities have shaped much writing from California's cities, so have the Heartland's harsh rural realities shaped literature produced there, limiting illusion without harming expression. Or limiting much illusion, for, as native daughter Joan Didion shows, parochialism and xenophobia are certainly not unknown in writings from the region. A list of recent writers from the Heartland is impressive: Everson, Didion, Valdez, Soto, Kingston, McDaniel, William Rintoul, Leonard Gardner, Robert Duncan, Art Cuelho, David Mas Masumoto, Frank Bidart, Larry Leavis, David St. John, Dewayne Rail, and Sherley Anne Williams. The latter four, plus Soto and a large cadre of others, constitute the Fresno Poets, an internationally renowned creative cluster nurtured by a major paleface poet, Phillip Levine.

On the edge of the Heartland there still exists considerable open country. Outsiders do not always understand the dimensions of our state's undeveloped land. The Mojave and Colorado deserts border it to the east and south. A remarkable and varied coastline marks the west. The north is Bigfoot

country, with virgin and second-growth forests as dense as any in America; northeast is a volcanic moonscape. Moreover, California is spined by mountains: the Sierra Nevada, the Cascades, the Coast Ranges, the Tehachapis.

Most interesting in the distinguished body of writing produced about Wilderness California is that it combines elements of Hazzard's first and third stages of frontier; that is, in the work of the finest writers, the topography of the land is never far from the topography of the soul. Look, for example, at the literary reclamation of the desert. Those barren lands were crossed by pioneers too intent on survival to notice the unique beauty surrounding them. By the turn of the century, however, the arid lands could be studied and sometimes romanticized. It was one of those interesting cases where changing circumstances allowed people to re-vision an area.

John C. Van Dyke's *The Desert* (1901) was the first in a series of books that changed the way those ostensible wastelands were viewed. J. Smeaton Chase and George Wharton James also contributed important volumes, but the finest of all desert books, the most mystical and eloquent, is Mary Hunter Austin's *The Land of Little Rain* (1903).

California's mountains and forests boast as distinguished a cadre of authors as do its deserts. The master here, of course, is John Muir. His work ranged from romantic to scientific. In books such as *The Mountains of California* (1894) or *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911), his prose soared toward poetry. My own favorite book in this category is William Henry Brewer's *Up and Down California, 1860-64* (1930); when he wrote his notes, nearly all the state was still Wilderness California. I find it a continuing delight.

Sometimes ignored when considering Wilderness California is its impact on poets and novelists, yet the region has inspired some of the state's finest literature. For instance, much of Jeffers' remarkable poetry—say, "Roan Stallion"—dem-

onstrates the symbolic power of California's coastline and hills. George R. Stewart wrote of the Sierra forest in two memorable novels, *Storm* (1941) and *Fire* (1949), and one of Walter Van Tilburg Clark's strongest and most magical novels, *The Track of the Cat* (1949), is set in eastern Sierra cattle country.

Unlike those books set in definite wilderness regions, much writing about California deals not with real places and real people but with the gap between what newcomers expect and what they find. This body of writing explores not a particular locale, but a region of the mind I call Fantasy California.

It is this fabled region, where expectation and realization blur, that remains an open and dangerous frontier, where disappointment looms like a prairie coulee, because in it dwells not the state's reality, but its symbolic power.

Fantasy California's existence entered the popular American mind in the very first English-language writing about the province. For many, Fantasy California remains the *only* California, a land of sun-bleached blondes on roller skates hurrying to hot tubs after working in their marijuana fields or, in the last century, a place where gold nuggets could be scooped up by the shovelful and fruit burgeoned year around. Sang Deanna Durbin and Robert Paige in a 1945 movie:

The climate is better
The ocean is wetter
The mountains are higher
The deserts are drier
The hills have more splendor
The girls have more gender
Ca-li-for-ni-ay!

Such hyperbole frequently leads to disillusionment. Wrote Alonzo Delano in 1849: "The greatness of California! Faugh!" Both extremes, while nonsensical, may reflect some private state of mind, the churning of an unclosed conceptual frontier.

Fantasy California has, in any case, produced an intriguing body of literature. To it I assign books as diverse as Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One* (1948), Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975), and Cyra McFadden's *The Serial* (1977). The apotheosis of Fantasy California's literature, however, is Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939).

As Lawrence Clark Powell explains, West wrote the novel "to formalize a tragic view of life. He perceived Hollywood and its product as the pure epitome of all that is wrong with life in the United States." *The Day of the Locust* is not about California; it is a book about Nathanael West's response to a world gone mad, as reflected in one small section of the state. A hint of his attitude may be gleaned from a letter he wrote to Josephine Herbst in 1933, shortly after he had become a screenwriter:

This place is Asbury Park, New Jersey . . . In other words, phooey on Cal. Another thing, this stuff about easy work is all wrong. My hours are from ten in the morning to six at night with a full day on Saturdays. There's no fooling here.

In any case, West produced a novel that typifies this imaginary realm, a dark mirror limning the gap between expectation and reality. It is the area's greatest work because it combines those very elements with West's unique talent and sensitivity, extrapolating to national and international dimensions toward a powerful surreal vision, all in the guise of California. As West demonstrates, artists can find in the Golden State's complexity vehicles for writing about virtually anything.

There is a real California, of course, and it is both varied and unique. Moreover, because it remains a seeker's state, California invites, if not redefinition, then expansion of the very concept of frontier. Those who would limit notions of a frontier to a static time of trappers, cowboys, or schoolmarms misunderstand that such were only symptoms of a far deeper quest, the soul's search for the possible.

If the closing of the physical frontier in 1890 created a pervasive sense of loss, it did so principally among those who required a physical boundary to evoke spiritual limits; however, the physical frontier was an effect, while the spiritual frontier was a cause, the quest itself. The sense of loss in California is less for missed historical opportunities than for the forfeiture of cherished illusions.

The quest continues, though some mourn the romanticized trappings of earlier excursions because they fail to realize that Tamsen Donner and Ma Joad were embarked on a continuing human expedition; as the latter says, ". . . we're the people—we go on." Even today, it is people like Ma Joad, whether they speak Hmong or Spanish or Tagalog, who not only venture to California but who also "go on," because they have the necessary grit. This new El Dorado has come to represent the cusp of the possible, a physical correlate for the spirit's enduring frontier. CHS

See "Selected Readings" beginning on page 261.

Gerald W. Haslam is an author, literary historian, and Professor of English at California State University, Sonoma. He has written or edited, among other works: *Western Writing* (1974), *Okies*; *Selected Stories* (1975), *California Heartland: Writing from the Great Central Valley* (1978), *Snapshots: Glimpses of the Other California* (1985), and *Voices of a Place: Social and Literary Essays from the Other California* (1987).

III. Literary California

Nathanael West, Raymond Chandler, and the Los Angeles Novel

by David Fine

In John Fowles's novel *Daniel Martin*, the title character, an Englishman transplanted in Los Angeles, greets a British actress arriving at Los Angeles Airport with the advice: "You have to decide one thing here—which is real, you or Los Angeles." This collapse of the boundary between reality and illusion, fact and fantasy, has been the central theme of novels about Los Angeles and Hollywood from the 1930s to the present. For novelists drawn to the film capital, unreality, impermanence, and instability have been the chief characteristics of the place.

Although there were novels and stories about Los Angeles and Hollywood before the 1930s, the real beginnings of the region's fiction can be traced to the writers lured to the West Coast as screenwriters in that decade. The invention of sound movies at the end of the twenties created a demand for writers who could construct dialogue—as well as for actors who could speak it. Studios scoured the nation (and England) for writers. Among those who would turn their West Coast experience into fiction were James M. Cain, Horace McCoy, John O'Hara, Nathanael West, Aldous Huxley, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Christopher Isherwood, Evelyn Waugh, and William Faulkner.

As outsiders, these writers had a distinct way of

"reading" the city. Usual definitions of literary regionalism begin with the assumption that the regional writer must be born in, deeply rooted in, and intimately connected with the region about which he or she writes. The Los Angeles novel, by contrast, is for the most part the product of newcomers, of outsiders, of writers born elsewhere, but who lived and worked for a time in the region. Most of them never felt at home in southern California, and it is their estrangement, their sense of displacement, that provides both theme and ambience to their works and distinguishes the Los Angeles novel from novels of other regions.

Regions, of course, have temporal as well as spatial existence. Frequently in regional fiction, the present is set off against the past. The Midwest of Sherwood Anderson and the South of William Faulkner come to mind. Again, Los Angeles fiction offers an exception. The counterpoint is not between the region's present and past, but, implicitly at least, between the West Coast present and the present or past of a different region. The contrast is between the place discovered and the place left behind. The past is elsewhere; history is in the East. Novels about California are, thus, about the East too, more specifically about the complex interaction between East and West, past and present.



Los Angeles beach club scene, ca. 1930. Throughout the Great Depression, Los Angeles continued to advertise itself as a place unscathed by the economic disaster. In addition to the movie industry, best known for Busby Berkeley extravaganzas and Fred Astaire in his "top hat, white tie, and tails," the city touted its recreational advantages, especially weather and beaches. Scenes such as this, which were widely used in promotional tracts of the period, extolled the good life, while disregarding the city's problems. With its mystique of success and pleasure, Los Angeles was a fitting ironic backdrop for the bleak novels of West and Chandler. *CHS Library, San Francisco*



Downtown Los Angeles, 1929. While the center of Los Angeles was much like any other big city, writers of the 1930s turned their attention away from the skyscrapers, and toward the mythical city, especially Hollywood. *Courtesy Huntington Library*

Between the 1880s and the 1930s Los Angeles was the best-advertised city in America. It was hyped by real estate speculators, railroad promoters, and city boosters as the New World Garden, the new El Dorado, the place of the fresh start and unlimited opportunity. Hundreds of thousands came, and by the end of the thirties the population swelled to almost 1.5 million people, twice as many as lived in San Francisco. The coming of rail transportation, an aqueduct supplying water from the Owens River, a man-made harbor, the discovery of oil, and a flourishing movie industry brought successive population booms. The California Dream, which in the mid-nineteenth century centered on San Francisco and the Mother Lode, migrated south to Los Angeles.

Above all, though, what brought people and sustained the myth of paradise regained was climate and its association with health. Miraculous powers to cure any ailment were attributed to the warm, dry Mediterranean climate. The lure of weather and the relative ease of railroad migration combined to attract a vast number of health seekers to Los Angeles. The region absorbed more than its fair share of invalids, the aged, and the ailing. In their wake came the healers, spiritualists, quacks of every sort, and cults. There were movements bearing such names as the Mighty I Am, Krotona,

Mankind United, and Ham and Eggs. Among the charismatic leaders who set up shop in southern California were Guy Ballard with his futuristic ray gun, Katherine Tingley, the Purple Mother of Point Loma, and Sister Aimee Semple McPherson of the Four Square Gospel. While it is tempting to exaggerate the influence of cults and sects on the region's development, it is hard to deny its appeal to the novelists. Spiritualists, medical quacks, cultists, and exotic healers run rampant through the fiction of West, Huxley, Waugh, and Chandler. It was all part of the illusion and deception that characterized the place. In West's *The Day of the Locust*, the artist-protagonist Tod Hackett, seeking out local color for his painting, "The Burning of Los Angeles," visits a number of cults:

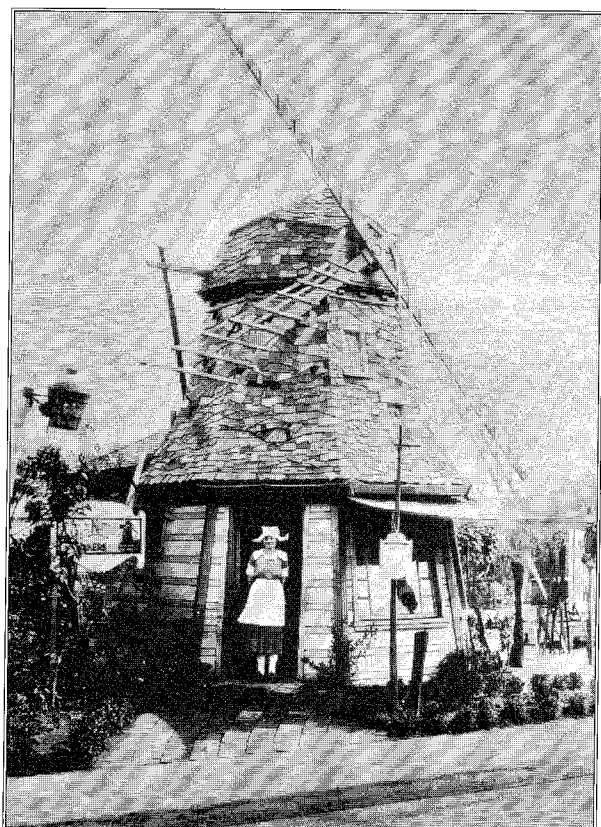
... he took his pad and pencils on a continuous hunt for other models. He spent his nights at the different Hollywood churches, drawing the worshippers. He visited the "Church of Christ Physical" where holiness was attained through the constant use of chest weights and spring grips; the "Church Invisible" where fortunes were told and the dead made to find lost objects; the "Tabernacle of the Third Coming" where a woman in male clothing preached the "Crusade against Salt"; and the "Temple Moderne" under whose glass and chromium roof "Brain Breathing, the secret of the Aztecs" was taught.

Hackett, trained at Yale's Art School, is both unnerved and amused by what he finds in Hollywood. He measures what he sees against his New England past and training. "He would," he muses, "never again do a fat red barn, old stone wall or sturdy Nantucket fisherman." Hollywood, the town itself, looks like a vast movie lot in West's novel. It is as if the studio sets had spilled over onto the surrounding streets. Hackett confronts a built landscape dominated by eclectic, deceptive fantasy houses aping every style in history. The past, thanks to the movies, has been transformed into parody, into a pastiche of period architecture. People have come west to escape the past, to begin again, but the past is grotesquely mocked in an architectural landscape of Chinese pagodas, Tudor cottages, Egyptian temples, and Mediterranean villas.

Fantasy architecture is linked in *The Day of the Locust* to the compulsive role-playing of its characters. Claude Estee, the screenwriter, lives in an ersatz Mississippi plantation home; he saunters back and forth on his veranda, ordering a mint julep from his black servant and getting the scotch and soda he really wants from his Chinese butler. Harry Greener, ex-vaudeville performer, tap dances his way through Hollywood selling silver polish,

suffers a heart attack, plays it as pure melodrama, and then dies. Fay Greener shuffles her deck of dream cards and plays a different role every day, from daddy's girl in a white sailor suit to a tough whore. The novel is a fun house of distorting mirrors in which all the characters play characters; movies are always going on in their heads and they invent and reinvent themselves as the cameras roll in their brains. Role playing has become indistinguishable from living. Life, like a movie extra's career, is one costumed role after another. The line between reality and illusion has disappeared.

When West turns from the architectural and human landscape to the natural landscape, he persistently describes it in terms of images drawn from the unnatural, the artificial world. Even nature is a made object. The edges of trees burn at dusk with a "pale violet" light, like neon tubes. The moon puts in an appearance as an "enormous bone button" poking through a "blue serge sky." Even the colors of food, under the spotlights of a market, are heightened and distorted. Oranges look red, fish pale green, steaks rose, and eggs ivory. The organic landscape has been pre-empted by the inorganic; it is again the landscape of the movie set, produced by technical knowhow, carefully placed props, and effective lighting.



Van de Kamp's first "Windmill" bakery store, Los Angeles, ca. 1930. Los Angeles builders became famous for yanking architectural styles out of context and putting them to bizarre uses. CHS Library, San Francisco

At precisely the same time West was launching the Hollywood novel, another kind of California fiction rooted in deception and masquerade was emerging: the tough guy detective story pioneered in San Francisco by Dashiell Hammett, but given a home in Los Angeles by Raymond Chandler. The hard-boiled L.A. detective story was in part an urban updating of the traditional western with its self-reliant hero, in part a response to the tough realities of the Depression decade, and in part a response to California realities—to the crimes made possible in a place that was up for grabs and where fortunes were made in the exploitation of water, land, and oil.

Chandler's hard-boiled detective novels differ significantly from the traditional detective novels of Agatha Christie or Dorothy Sayers. Crime in this new mode is not an aberration from an otherwise orderly society—a "murder in the vicarage." It is endemic, pervasive, and corporate. There are no neat solutions in Chandler's world. The division between good and evil is never clear. Cops are on the take; doctors are often drug pushers; rare book dealers are smut peddlers; the beautiful, innocent-looking young client is really a ruthless killer. No one can be trusted; nothing is what it appears to be. Deception is everywhere present. In such a world, the detective has to go it alone, trusting only his own eyes and instincts.

Crime in the southern California version is ordinarily an act carried out in the past and hidden behind a respectable façade in the present. One escapes the consequences of past acts by switching identities, changing names and neighborhoods in a rootless, fluid society. California permits, even encourages, such transformations. Crime provides wealth and wealth provides anonymity. Respectability comes with the large house in the hills. Barricaded behind high walls, Chandler's criminals are insulated from the past. It is the job of the detective to penetrate the façades, expose crimes hidden in the past, separate illusion from reality, deception from truth.

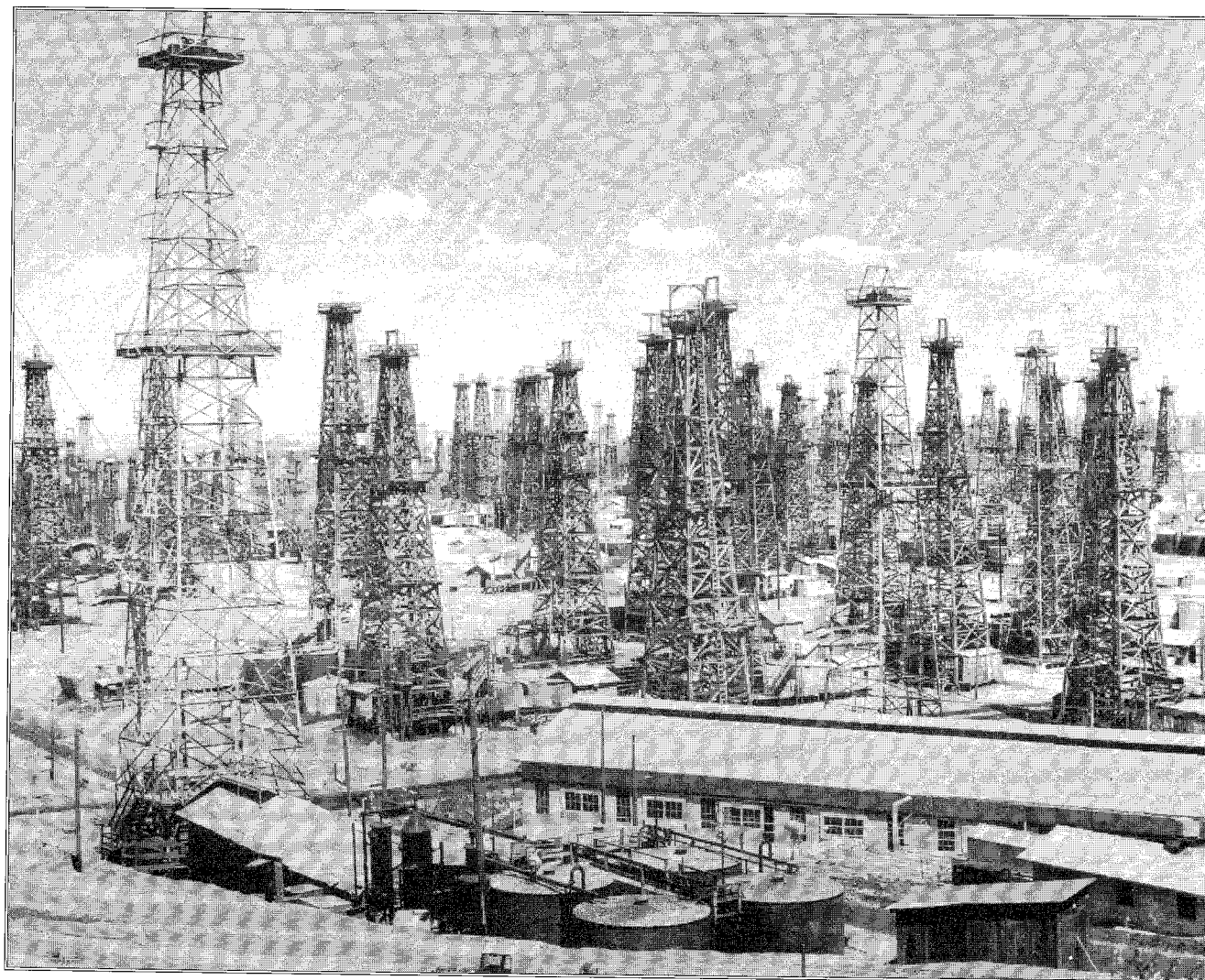
Blackmail in such fables becomes the central event because it is what happens when someone knows another's secret, his or her past, and uses that power to extort money. The criminal is suddenly vulnerable, and to retrieve this invulnerability he/she makes the blackmailer the next victim. Like the blackmailer, the detective uncovers true identities beneath false ones, but for justice, not for personal gain.

In *The Big Sleep*, published in 1939, the same year as West's novel, Chandler established the detective novel formula. General Sternwood, not himself a criminal, has nonetheless made his fortune by exploiting the oil reserves beneath the city. He has raised two ungovernable daughters and is being blackmailed, presumably for the gambling debts of the older of them. What detective Marlowe discovers about the Sternwoods, though, runs deeper than gambling debts and the family's tangled relationships with gangsters. The central act, the crime buried in the past and hidden even from the general himself, is the murder committed by Carmen, the younger daughter, of the man who jilted her. By the end of the novel there are six corpses, including the man that Carmen shot in the oil fields beneath the Sternwood mansion. Marlowe himself is almost murdered in the same way, in the same place, and for the same reason. The oil fields, hidden in a park beneath the house, are both the source of the Sternwood wealth and symbol of the family corruption. Marlowe looks out from the house to the oil fields below:

On this lower level faint and far off I could just see some of the old wooden derricks of the oilfield from which the Sternwoods had made their money. Most of the field was public park now, cleaned up and donated to the city by General Sternwood. But a little of it was still producing in groups of wells pumping five or six barrels a day. The Sternwoods, having moved up the hill, could no longer smell the stale sump water or the oil, but they could still look out of their front windows and see what had made them rich. If they wanted to. I didn't suppose they would want to.

The passage offers a clear instance of Chandler's symbolic, moral California geography. The oil field is the family secret, the house above an elaborate mask that Marlowe, as detective, must rip off to discover the truth hidden in the oil fields and recover some sense of order on the landscape. But his success is only partial. Crimes are not easily or neatly solved in Chandler's world. Marlowe is able to keep Carmen from doing any more damage, but the jigsaw puzzle is not completed. Some pieces are left over and others don't fit. Chandler, always more interested in style and atmosphere than in the solution of crimes, once said that a good detective story is one "you could read even if you knew someone had torn out the last chapter." The solution was "the olive in the martini."

Each in his own way, Chandler and West set the



The Signal Hill Oil Field between Long Beach and Los Angeles in the 1930s. During the industry's boom years, wells were drilled wherever companies found oil, even in residential neighborhoods. Oil derricks loomed over the Sternwood estate, where detective Philip Marlowe faced death in Chandler's *The Big Sleep*. CHS Library, San Francisco

L.A. novel on the course it would follow for the next fifty years. They showed us the dark, shadowy side of the American—and California—Dream, that we can escape the past and reinvent our lives, be what we dream of being, live the lives we fantasize. The writers who followed—Waugh, Schulberg, Mailer, Didion, Dunne, Kaminsky, and others—took their starting points from the same sense of the dream gone haywire. The land of the new beginning could also be the land of the disastrous finale, the place where the American road ends and turns back on itself at the edge of the continent.

CHS

See "Selected Readings" beginning on page 261.

David Fine is Professor of English at California State University, Long Beach. He has written *The City, the Immigrant and American Fiction, 1880-1920* (1977) and edited two collections on California, *Los Angeles in Fiction: a Collection of Original Essays* (1984) and *Unknown California* (1985). He has also published articles on California literature and is literary editor of the magazine, *The Californians*.

III. Literary California

William Saroyan in California

by Margaret Bedrosian

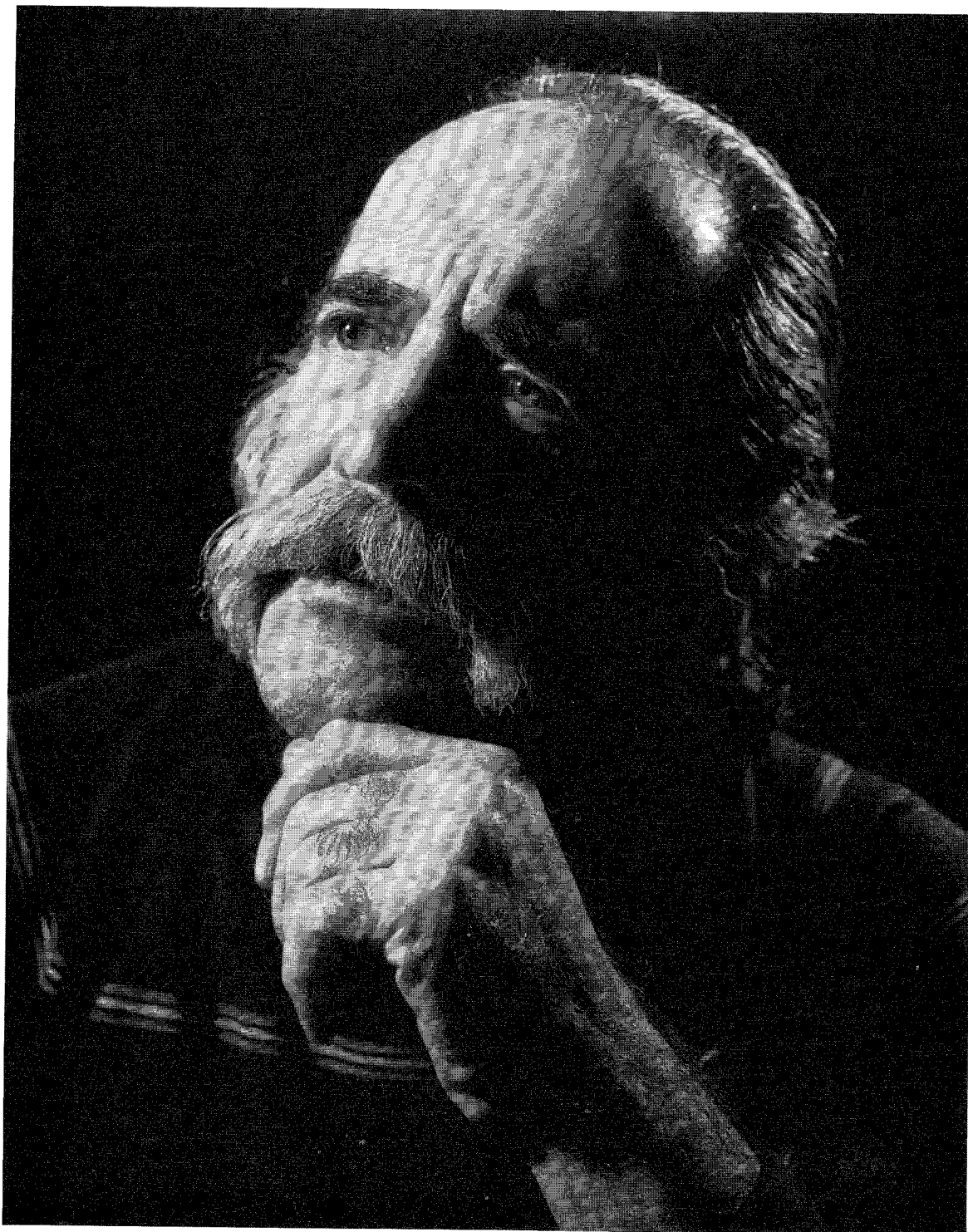
Like other writers who have depicted the Golden State in their work, William Saroyan seemed to describe a fantasy-land as much as an actual terrain. The California that appears in his short stories and novels fluctuates in imagery: at times it lulls us with the pastels and mist of a romantic watercolor; at other times, the imagery becomes gloomy and the landscape itself seems to brood on tensions that preoccupied Saroyan through much of his life. The sources of these tensions cannot be separated from Saroyan's family and cultural past. Much of what he experienced as an individual reflected the social and psychological challenges other Armenians faced in California during the earlier decades of this century. Saroyan's evasion of and confrontation with these challenges forms one of the central dialectics in his writing; in turn, this pattern offers a unique view of California's heartland, where landscape and aspects of local color selectively reflect the distinct currents of a writer's imagination.

Armenians first immigrated to California from the northeastern United States in the 1890s. The portion of California that attracted them most strongly was the San Joaquin Valley, a region that reminded them of their homeland in the heart of the Ottoman Empire. Here they could acquire land and farm, a simple enough desire, but one which had been suppressed for centuries in their native land, where Turkish overlords set limits on their freedom. In the next few decades, the imagery of California as a promised land of agricultural plenty spread through the Ottoman interior, while Armenian peasants dreamed of a time when they

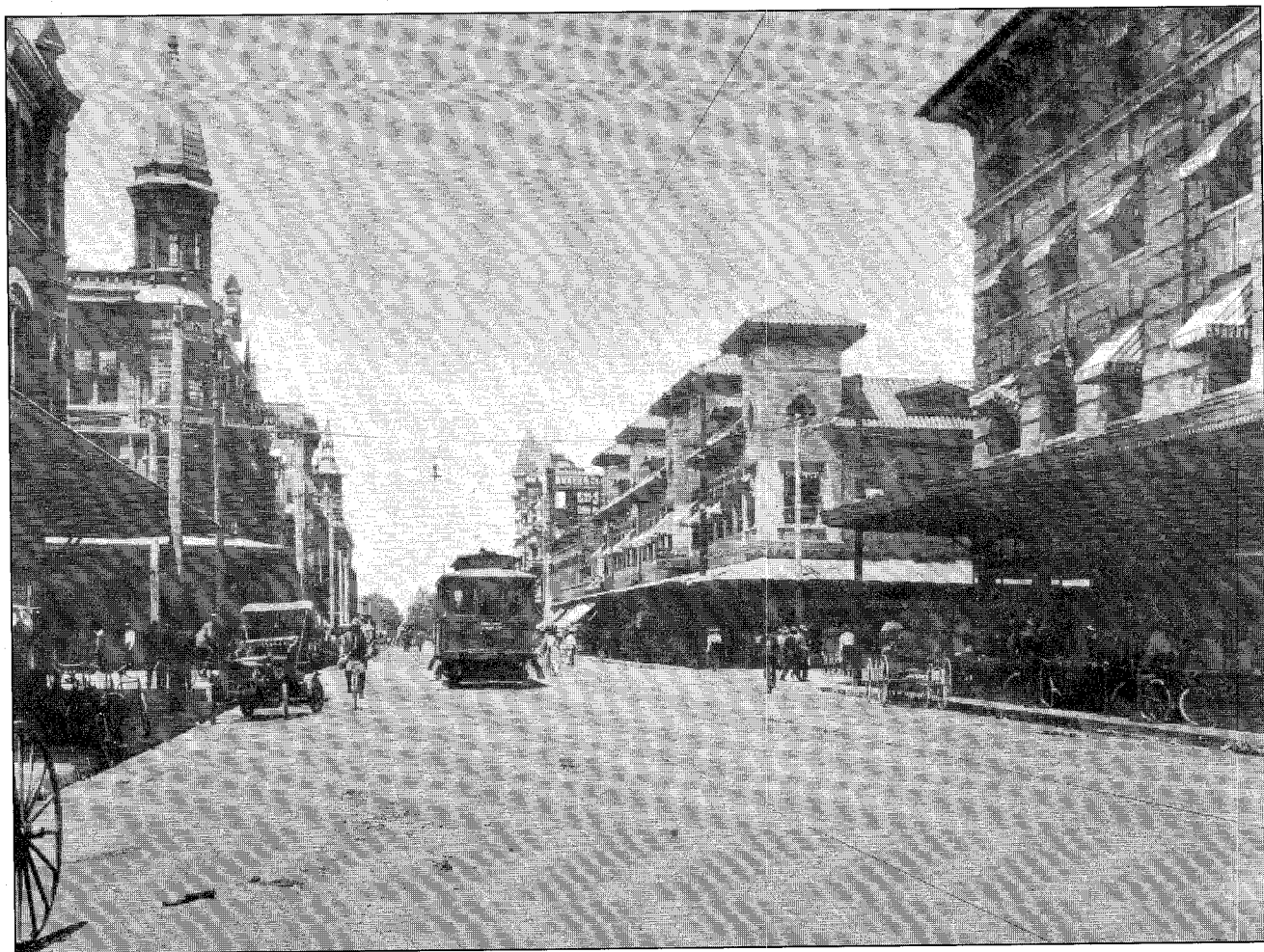
might migrate to California and start anew. Though deportation and massacre in the 1890s and most fatally in 1915 would prevent many Armenians from realizing their dream, the image had been so firmly implanted that in many cases survivors, especially children of slain parents, carried the vision of California as their final destination when they managed their escape to the United States.

No matter how they arrived in the Central Valley, once there the Armenians lost no time making up for economic deprivations experienced in the Old Country. Their primary desire was to save enough money to buy land. All manner of comfort and leisure was sacrificed to this goal. Women worked in packing houses in the summer, men hired out for labor, and nothing extra was spent on housing. A common saying of the time was "no house can produce a farm, but a good farm can produce a house." But in the process of exerting their long-suppressed will, the Armenians managed to arouse some of the most antagonistic feelings of any ethnic minority in California. As Fresno was entering a period of full-blown prosperity, enjoying the wealth that agriculture bestowed, the pillars of the community became protective of their image as an up-and-coming All-American city, and jealous of their power to guide the area's fortunes.

Among the most aggressive of any ethnic minorities in their push to improve their fortunes, the Armenians drew most of the hostility of the "Americans" in the San Joaquin Valley. The bitterness of old-line Americans and the bemused response of the Armenians were amply documented by the sociologist Richard Tracy La Pierre in his doctoral



William Saroyan as photographed by Paul Kalinian, 1976. A very private person, Saroyan usually refused to be photographed, and images of him are rare. When he befriended Fresno photographer Paul Kalinian, however, he allowed Kalinian to interview and photograph him in 1976. Since Saroyan's death in 1981, Kalinian's photographs have been celebrated around the world. Kalinian is currently writing, directing, and producing a documentary film on Saroyan, including his childhood reminiscences and partly narrated by Saroyan himself. The film is scheduled for completion late in 1990, and after a premiere in Fresno, will be shown in cities across the United States. *Courtesy Paul Kalinian, Paul's Photography Studio, Fresno*



Downtown Fresno in 1911. When seven-year-old William Saroyan and his family arrived in 1915, the city had entered a period of robust growth. CHS Library, San Francisco

study, "The Armenian Colony in Fresno County, California," completed in 1930. A brief sampling of some of the comments made about the Armenians by La Pierre's interviewees suggests the range of anger and distaste directed at the group:

They always want eggs, butter, sugar, etc., at lower prices than others pay . . . except when they sell it they want a cent or two more.¹

If you treat them civilly they are ungracious. If you are brutal and rough with them, they respect you. Very few of them ever smile—they have a sour countenance as though every thought was mean, *not sad*, just mean. If their conduct in Turkey is as it is here, no wonder the Turks kill them. Many, many Americans long to run them out of the country (p. 341).

You can't go into a show or any amusement place without running across a bunch of loud-mouthed Armenians that are trying to start a row. They have to be in a bunch about 6 to 1 or they are yellow. They ought to be out in a part of the town separated from us as the Russians and the Chinese who at least are keeping their places (p. 342).

In one comment that summed up the anti-Armenian feelings, one woman from Fowler (a town near Fresno) stated: "They are the only foreigners in Fowler who think they are just as good as we are. I don't know why they aren't, but we think they aren't" (p. 346).

Bearing the brunt of such hostility, the Armenians might occasionally find scapegoats of their own. La Pierre reported that Aram Saroyan, William's maternal uncle, laid the discrimination against his people at the door of the Jews, who knew that "the Armenians will become their strongest rivals in commerce" (p. 408). More commonly, though, Armenians were at a loss to explain how they had aroused such dislike. One Armenian told La Pierre, "I have mulled it all over for so long, and so often, that it has become magnified ten-fold and the prejudice existing as a reality in my mind is probably far greater than the prejudice actually found against me" (p. 413). Another, a lawyer, stated that the prejudice "has unquestionably made us self-conscious, even timid, in the presence of

non-Armenians and has . . . modified the personality of all of us who have many non-Armenian contacts" (p. 413).

It was into such a social milieu that William Saroyan's immediate family moved when he was a boy of seven. By the time they came to Fresno, Saroyan and his siblings had already spent five years in an Oakland orphanage while his mother worked as a live-in maid during the week (his father had died when Saroyan was three years old). The resulting feelings of emotional deprivation, which gnawed at Saroyan for most of his life, were alternately soothed and exaggerated in the new surroundings. The Fresno that Saroyan came to know became the backdrop for a personal melodrama that resembled the trapeze act of the metaphor in his most famous short story: at one pole were those images of laden vineyards and fruit trees that shaded the Armenians from the valley sun, and at the other pole were the images of stark loneliness and loss. The former realm he rendered faultlessly in *My Name Is Aram* (1937), a collection of short stories that to this day appeals to more readers than anything else Saroyan wrote. The reason these stories are so well-liked has as much to do with what Saroyan avoided saying in them as with what he actually described. At one with nature, frozen in time and nostalgia, eating peasant fare and drinking the good water of Fresno, the book's Armenians and other ethnic characters belong to a fairy tale about how things ought to have been. Saroyan characterized Fresno in his

introductory note as "the ugly little city containing the large comic world," and he leaned heavily on the comic to transform the ugly.²

Perhaps the most well-known story in *My Name Is Aram* is "The Pomegranate Trees." This piece is noteworthy from several points of view. At one level, it reads much like a parable about the relationship between the land of the Central Valley and the farmers who willed agriculture—and agribusiness—onto it. Early in the story, the narrator, Aram, describes the land his uncle has bought at the foot of the Sierra Nevada:

It was full of every kind of desert plant that ever sprang out of dry hot earth. It was overrun with prairie dogs, squirrels, horned toads, snakes, and a variety of smaller forms of life. The space over this land knew only the presence of hawks, eagles, and buzzards. It was a region of loneliness, emptiness, truth, and dignity. It was nature at its proudest, dryest, loneliest, and loveliest (p. 36).

This passage neatly brings together typical strains in Saroyan's work; first and foremost, it recognizes the overpowering "truth" of the desert. As the story progresses, the reader sees that this geography is much more implacable than the human will to transform it. The pomegranate trees that Uncle Melik has so poetically and romantically planted become an absurdity, totally out of place in the vastness of the dry land. Even more disheartening, their jewel-like fruit, so treasured by the Armenians, is mostly unknown to salesmen and markets. Read as a commentary on the destiny of agriculture in



Fresno area country home and fig orchard, ca. 1925. Armenian Americans brought both their farming expertise and their native crops to California. Saroyan's Uncle Aram grew pomegranates, while other families cultivated figs or grapes in the hot Central Valley. CHS Library, San Francisco

the valley, the story carries a strong suggestion: it is water that makes the lush illusion possible, and it is the absence of water that will eventually shrivel the fruit orchards into a barren memory that leaves one silent.

At a more personal level, the passage cited above and the story as a whole underline Saroyan's desired relationship with that land and the psychological reality it symbolizes in his own life: the "loneliness, emptiness, truth, and dignity" that are so impervious to pomegranate trees nevertheless offer a model of comportment through an emotionally dessicated life. Orphanhood is never mentioned in this story, nor anywhere else in *My Name Is Aram*, but the code of conduct required of orphans is indirectly alluded to in bits and pieces; it is a code predicated on an unsentimental appraisal of ultimate ends and a debonair creativity that responds "what the hell!" It is this resilience that unites diverse characters in other stories of the collection, such as the sad Uncle Jorgi of "A Journey to Hanford," who sits all day under the tree and plays the zither, indifferent to his father's demands to make money harvesting watermelons in Hanford; or Locomotive 38, the Ojibway Indian who patronizes Aram and takes him fishing for the sheer fun of relieving their shared boredom.

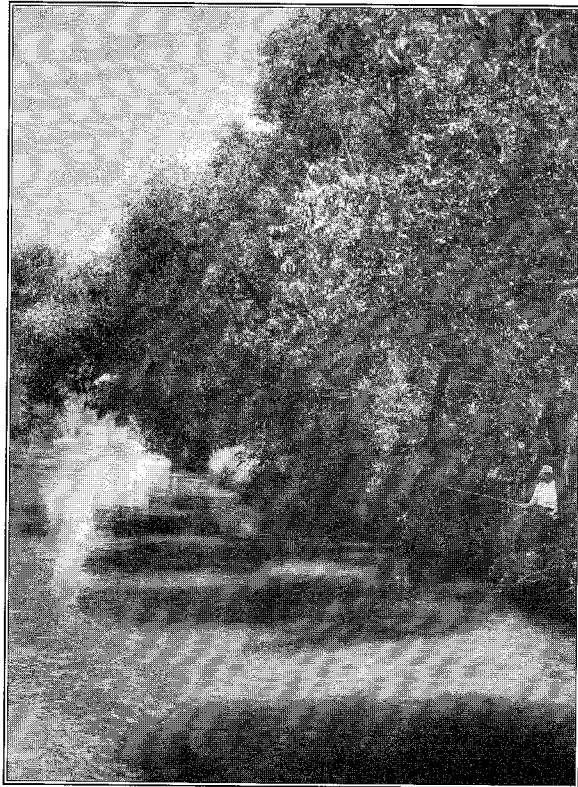
This view of life is expressed with delightful zest in "The Three Swimmers." Here Abbott Darcous, an old man educated at Yale, runs a grocery store in Malaga, an old farming suburb of Fresno, for the sake of "casual poetry." Much of Darcous' stylishness as a human being (and style was a quality Saroyan greatly admired in himself and others) emerges in the way he interacts with the three young swimmers, "foreigners" who nevertheless identify themselves as Californians. As the boys supply the grocer with information about their backgrounds, Darcous responds to each with the poetry of local color. Learning that Mourad was born near the Southern Pacific tracks, he gushes, "Well, I'll be irrigated." To Joe's comment that "we ain't educated," he replies "Well, I'll be picked off a tree and thrown into a box." And at the news that Mourad speaks Armenian, he bursts with, "Well, I'll be cut off a vine and eaten grape by grape by a girl in her teens" (p. 157). This interchange and the story in general suggests the prevailing mood of "The Pomegranate Trees"; although Malaga is not located in the desert foothills, neither has it ever been recognized as a cosmopolitan hub. Yet the charm of this story lies in the incongruity of such "different" individuals coming together by chance for a brief while and managing to create a memorable event, partaking in a communion of canned beans and water. It is this mood of "casual" serendipity that gives many of Saroyan's stories and

plays their unique appeal, most notably *Time Of Your Life*, which is essentially a series of "found" moments.

But behind the generally appealing and affirmative images of *My Name Is Aram* and a host of other short stories that extol the momentary victories against emptiness are a host of other Saroyan vignettes and longer narratives that present a more sober view of the geographical and spiritual landscape. One of Saroyan's best-known stories, "Seventy Thousand Assyrians," takes us part of the way into this more twilit perspective. Significantly, this story about annihilation, American-style, takes place in a city, San Francisco, rather than in farm country, where this subject can be more easily evaded. The piece centers on an encounter between an Assyrian barber and Saroyan, a meeting that rephrases the dialectic between the void and the creative moment echoing through *My Name Is Aram*. Here, the barber represents an entire people diminishing in numbers by the forces of assimilation. Somewhat like the pomegranate orchard in the midst of the un pitying desert, the Assyrian barber, Theodore Badal, is a filament of life hanging on before an inevitable end comes to his people and to himself. As he himself recognizes, "we have no writers, we have no news—well, there is a little news: once in a while the English encourage the Arabs to massacre us, that is all. It's an old story, we know all about it." Although Saroyan ends the piece with a brave note of affirmation, saluting all those unknown individuals who carry the "dignity" and "brotherhood of things alive," the final image of Badal, "standing in a barber shop, in San Francisco, in 1933, and being, still, himself, the whole race," leaves a lingering sense of loneliness and emptiness in the reader's mind.³

Poised against these numerous stories and sketches that are basically positive in mood are others that more directly address Saroyan's ambivalent feelings as a young Armenian orphan growing up in Fresno. At times he is very indirect in describing the hardships his family and the Armenians in general experienced in Fresno. A chapter from one of his innumerable autobiographies, *Here Comes, There Goes, You Know Who* (1961) is representative. Entitled "The Cat," it offers a short allegory of his family's situation far away from the homeland. Describing the play of the predator cat with a mouse, Saroyan concludes: "Excelsior, the cat, the caught mouse, and us. There we were in America, never to see Bitlis again."⁴ Though he continues by detailing some of the more endearing aspects of their house, such as the leaking ceilings, there is little doubt that he and his family resemble "the caught mouse" more than they resemble the cat.

A more direct description of the realities facing



Fresno area irrigation canal, ca. 1925. Irrigation canals were major factors in the social and economic development of Fresno and other arid regions and by the early twentieth century had become prominent features of the landscape. The verdant edges of the canals are important settings in Saroyan's writings. *CHS Library, San Francisco*

immigrant children in unfriendly Fresno schools in the 1910s and 1920s appears in a chapter entitled "The School." Many teachers took their role as assimilators quite seriously; during an era when the child's native culture and language were not valued in the classroom, confrontations between teachers and Armenian children could be fiery. In this sketch, Saroyan presents a classic encounter between himself in the role of feisty and clever Armenian schoolboy, and Miss Chamberlain, flirtatious yet adamant guardian of the American creed. In a running monologue that might have come from the pages of *La Pierre's* study, she berates Willie for not helping her keep order among the foreign children, whom she describes in the following fashion:

... the kids of immigrants, Armenians mainly, but others, too, a few Syrians, a few Assyrians, dark people with dark eyes you never could really understand. They kept to themselves, you never knew if you were getting through, they were still in another world, even though they were born in Fresno, and why did I encourage them to stay that way instead of opening up and being teachable, and *here*, instead of far away? (p. 68).

The little boy's retorts to this barrage reach a climax when he asserts: "But we're here, too, now, and if you can't stand the only way we can be Americans, too, we'll go right on being Armenians" (p. 69).

Behind such bravado, though, lurked a sensitiv-

ity to the pain that all children suffer when they are not accepted for who they are. A vignette in an early short story called "The Death of Children," which also takes place in Emerson School, contains some of the most touching passages Saroyan ever wrote. Introducing these sketches of children with the line, "There were all kinds of us," Saroyan captures the loneliness and victimization that children face. He describes Rosa Tapia, the little Mexican girl, who sings a song in her native language as if to substitute for all the "pointless things" she did not know; Alice Schwab, the German-Jewish girl most likely to succeed, yet least liked, who dies before she has fully lived; and most unforgettably, Carson Sampler, the sullen-faced castoff child of "no-account Southerners," whose pinched face haunts Saroyan's dreams, reflecting the depth of his own childhood deprivations.

Indeed, what the adult Saroyan took as the cost of "being Armenian" entailed much more than an occasional battle with a grammar school teacher; it was much closer to the shivers he felt watching Carson Sampler's starving face and bare feet. The rough-and-ready pose he assumed for public consumption hid considerable guilt, insecurity, and anger toward his family and his ethnic group.⁵ *Rock Wagram*, an autobiographical novel from the early 1950s, suggests the tensions that Saroyan felt in mid-life. Set in Fresno, the story concerns the return home of an Armenian, Rock Wagram, who

has made it big as a movie actor. Although most of the plot focuses on Rock's failed marriage and the split he feels between his Fresno "self" and the slick *chic* of Los Angeles and New York, the deepest source of the protagonist's unease lies in his past as the son of Armenian immigrants to Fresno. The story is peppered with references to Fresno's homey values and farmers' perennial worries about the water level, as well as formulaic refrains that praise grandmother and the meals of "tea, flat bread, white cheese, black olives, parsley, mint, and sliced sun-dried beef."⁶ But underneath this quaint façade, Rock feels a simmering ambivalence and estrangement from his family. Although Saroyan lost his father at the age of three, he grew up in an environment where Armenians clung to unyielding family values. His father's fulfilled life in California as a minister and a would-be writer became the sore that Saroyan himself continually reopened as he flailed himself in his work. As described by his brother-in-law Aram, Armenak Saroyan's "whole ambition in the Old Country was to be able to teach the kids to learn, to obey, and to be a *man*."⁷

In the novel, Rock's unresolved feelings, his underlying doubts about *how* to be a true Armenian man, aggravate his marital problems. Asked by his aunt if he has not yet found "a nice Armenian girl to marry," Rock retorts, "Do you know one?" The woman's response again demonstrates how much separates Rock from his Fresno past:

"One?" the woman said. "There are hundreds, and most of them are here in Fresno. Girls are not lacking. To marry a stranger is perhaps an adventure, but the question is, Can the daughter of people who do not understand us be a true wife to one of our sons?" (p. 83).

Symptomatic of the xenophobia that marks many immigrants, this comment also offers a measure of the psychological distance between Rock and the place of his birth. Filled with marriageable Armenian girls willing to fall into duty, Fresno is the place of inbreeding, and by implication, sterility. But doubling the ambivalence is Rock's relationship to his own roots; rejected by his father, he is no longer a "true" son. As a result, he is not prepared to meet the challenge of relating to a non-Armenian wife either. As he struggles with the decision to "take her back," to ignore her threats and desires, it becomes obvious that the forgiveness he never found in his father eludes him as well, keeping him swimming in a current that never carries him to security, or maturity. As he leaves Fresno on a trip with his grandmother, Rock comes to a bridge where long ago a young Armenian friend drowned as he tried to get to the other side of the river. Rock's thought applies as much to his

own dilemma as to his dead friend's: "If he's swimming the San Joaquin River, all he's got to do is get across. All he's got to do at any time is not drop dead" (p. 169). Having entered a stream that has carried him far from his origins—both as a son of immigrants and a bartender in a city whose values are fixed—Rock Wagram has yet to find rest, especially through the family meaning he claims to want. The novel ends with Rock in barely purposeful motion, racing to catch the sunrise, devoid of hope and family, clutching a token of counterfeit humor.

The deep-seated futility that periodically engulfed Saroyan's work reaches a nadir in his succeeding novel, *The Laughing Matter* (1953), his most pessimistic story. Here the brooding vineyards of the San Joaquin Valley form an apt backdrop to the torment and bitterness of the main character, who significantly envisions his ethnic group, the Assyrians, as a dying race. Though, characteristically, Saroyan would no sooner find himself in such a pit than he would take a flying jump to the other extreme, these polarities suggest just how complex his view of California, the Armenians, and his family was. Fundamentally at odds with himself, his depictions of the Armenians, other ethnic groups, the "mainstream," and the San Joaquin Valley are given many distinct shadings in his work. What remains consistent in his writing, beginning in the earlier works and trickling into the very last ones, are the sentiments of a local boy shaped by the tensions common to other Armenians of his generation in California. Like them, Saroyan tried to hold onto a pugnacious, absurdist, and perhaps absurd, creed that made the best of exile in the Golden West. As Father Kasparian, a character in his play, states,

Armenians in dispersion all over the world, but especially here in California, in Fresno, will continue to be Armenians, they will not become so foolishly American that being also Armenian will ever be an embarrassment to them, and something to forget as quickly as possible, by marrying foreigners and bringing up children who neither know nor care that they are Armenian.⁸

However, as Saroyan was all too aware through his own childhood and his experience of marrying outside the tribe, life in California only highlighted millenia of history, wherein Armenians did not always have the choice of carrying the banner of their identity intact. Instead, they, like he, took refuge in self-images, spirited, yet contradictory, that enabled them to take leaps of faith into a landscape where illusions can thrive—until the basic void closes in, and leaves them speechless.

CHS



Kearney Avenue,
Fresno County, ca.
1925. With its lush,
irrigated, Middle-Eastern
atmosphere, Fresno
appealed to the
Armenian immigrants.
Though Saroyan's
fictional character,
Rock Wagram, drove an
automobile, he would
have passed between
rows of palm trees such
as these on his trip
from the bright lights
of Hollywood to the
serene and secure
Armenian community
of Fresno. CHS Library,
San Francisco

See notes beginning on page 261.

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Dust-Bowl refugee migrant workers picking cotton in California during the 1930s. This illustration and others in this article are by the great American artist Thomas Hart Benton, from the Limited Editions Club edition of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940). Courtesy The Limited Editions Club and the Steinbeck Research Center, San Jose State University

III. Literary California

John Steinbeck's Spatial Imagination in *The Grapes of Wrath*: A CRITICAL ESSAY

by George Henderson

Introduction: Representation as Social Action.

The winter of 1937-38 was especially wet in the San Joaquin Valley. Steady and heavy rains saturated the San Joaquin flood plain, particularly in cotton-growing Madera County. In February of that winter John Steinbeck wrote to his agent Elizabeth Otis:

I must go over into the interior valleys. There are about five thousand families starving to death over there, not just hungry but actually starving. The government is trying to feed them and get medical attention to them with the fascist group of utilities and banks and huge growers sabotaging the thing all along the line and yelling for a balanced budget. In one tent there are twenty people quarantined for smallpox and two of the women are to have babies in that tent this week. I've tied into the thing from the first and I must knock these murderers on the heads. Do you know what they're afraid of? They think that if these people are allowed to live in camps with proper sanitary facilities, they will organize and that is the bugbear of the large landowner and the corporation farmer. The states and counties will give them nothing because they are outsiders. But the crops of any part of this state could not be harvested without these outsiders. I'm pretty mad about it. No word of this outside because when I have finished my job the jolly old associated farmers will be after my scalp again (Steinbeck and Wallsten, 158).

For several years Steinbeck had been eyeing the situation of migrant agricultural workers in the "interior valleys." In October 1936 *The San Francisco*

News ran "Harvest Gypsies," a series of Steinbeck's articles, commissioned by the paper's chief editorial writer (see *St. Pierre*, 79-81 for excerpts). In those brief pieces a reader could find most of the major themes about California agriculture that Steinbeck would later chronicle in *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939.

Shortly after "Harvest Gypsies" was printed, Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and *In Dubious Battle* appeared in the bookstores. *In Dubious Battle* was selected by the Book of the Month Club, and within a month one hundred thousand copies had been purchased. Both novels concerned the social costs and unique social formations that Steinbeck attributed to the system of corporate agriculture in the valley (*St. Pierre*, 81). Thus, by the time Steinbeck began *The Grapes of Wrath*, his vision was keen and his hand well practiced.

The new novel began to take on a spectacular life of its own. Six months after publication, when two hundred thousand copies had been sold, *Commonwealth* magazine noted that "when a book sells like that, and when it causes the comment and controversy this book has, it becomes a cultural phenomenon of important dimensions. The literary and critical industry of the country is not really geared to handle it" (quoted in *St. Pierre*, 98-101). The critic lamented the lack of attention to the book's literary merit. Most readers only wanted to know whether or not California resembled Steinbeck's depiction (see Kappel, for example, on the novel's ban in Kern County). Too much criticism, both good and bad, had been geared to assessing the factual

content and background of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Only in later years did the "pattern of criticism" turn to an assessment of the novel's relationship to themes, such as biblical allegory and the "Wagons West" idiom.

During the late thirties anyone who cared could have corroborated the general events, if not the details, provided by Steinbeck—the Hoovervilles and Resettlement Administration camps, grower-induced labor surplus, crop specialization by region, the migrant trek from the Dust Bowl states, the vigilantism and the relief work, and the importance of cotton as *the* new speculative crop.

The release of *The Grapes of Wrath* could not have been better timed in relation to the publication of Carey McWilliams' *Factories in the Field* (1939). In broadly supported and convincing prose, McWilliams wrote a mirror text for Steinbeck's novel, although the two writers did not collaborate. Although many contemporary readers apparently did, they did not need to refer to the novel in order to understand the historical reliance of much of California's agricultural production upon a migrant labor class. Yet *The Grapes of Wrath* did fulfill a role as a regionalist and social realist interpretive text. The novel stands as a document of social change. Nonetheless, more can be asked of it.

For example, it might be interesting to turn to a problem of the human condition that Steinbeck apparently set up in *The Grapes of Wrath*. One of Steinbeck's fundamental concerns was to represent the migration of white midwestern families to California as part of that recurrent human condition, while arguing that the human condition itself is shaped by historical and social contingencies. He asked what relationship the laws of nature had to human-made situations: nature does not transcend or determine history, nor does history supersede nature. This idea, I think, accounts for the immortal qualities of some of Steinbeck's characters. At the same time, only the historical moment, the intervention of social relationships, could reveal what might be enduringly true: Ma Joad's heroic will to survive—to humanize the natural survival instinct—was only manifested by economic threat. Tom Joad's and Casy's ultimate belief in a transcendent human family was hammered out only by virtue of their ability to gauge just how far power relations had penetrated the local situation. Steinbeck's adeptness at elevating demoralized and beaten migrants to the epochal level of history-makers, and inverting social relations by phrasing specifically local questions in terms of grandiose themes, fueled his detractors, who would not have

dared to vest moral authority in a rootless, landless class. The point, then, is that Steinbeck registered the duality of history and nature in terms of a social inversion.

One of the devices by which Steinbeck infused his work with this thematic content was to saturate his readers' minds with an understanding of the genetic, formative *processes* that seemed to push the story along in such a way as to make every character and every action part of an enveloping process. This point seems to lie behind Peter Lisca's observation over thirty years ago:

Kenneth Burke has pointed out that "most of the characters derive their role, which is to say their personality, purely from their relationship to the basic situation." But what he takes to be a serious weakness is actually one of the book's greatest accomplishments (Lisca, "*The Grapes of Wrath* as Fiction," 736).

The Grapes of Wrath was indeed relentlessly didactic, even formulaic, but by ensuring that the readers grasped the processes involved (or the "basic situation," as the above quote would have it) Steinbeck could then suggest how different orders of experience represented and contained others by virtue of the overarching causes; for example, attachment to land represented a wholesomeness of body and spirit. What is inherently geographical also turns out to be inherently social, both constituting, and constitutive of, the same processes. It is from social and geographical relationships that meaning radiates, rather than from an individual character or action.

In this way small details were charged with representing *and* bearing out larger processes. This seems like just the sort of thing befitting a philosophical argument of naturalism. But it should not be forgotten that it was the *modernization* of agricultural production and its attendant forms of consciousness that, Steinbeck argued, brought about this state of affairs; in particular that aspect of modernization whereby technological change loosens boundaries, brings into contact formerly discrete things and persons, and allows for a seemingly small event to be nested inside something more significant. The particular importance of the modernizing process as detailed by Steinbeck was that it foreshadowed representation (the power to grasp cognitively the rending and reshuffling of traditional social bonds) itself as a precursor to social action. A fundamental dilemma for the Joads was the inappropriateness of their own daily thought and practices to an interpretation of the new political and economic order. Nowhere was

this contradiction more evident than in the endless bickering over the value of talking over their problems. Steinbeck himself took on the problem of representation insofar as the interchapters re-narrated the story as a form of documentation. Moreover, representation became by the end of the novel *both* a narrative strategy *and* a form of social action.

Taking these general points, I want to explore how they conferred a particular kind of imaginative process to Steinbeck's writing of the *The Grapes of Wrath*. This imagination orchestrated the geographical *sites* and the *situation* of characters depicted in the novel, the particular social processes as they unfolded across space, which only people swept up in the modernizing process could have understood.

The *Grapes of Wrath* cannot be understood fully unless the characters are seen to develop in relationship to the places through which they moved—places that they also reconstituted, if only momentarily. This approach is meant to be a general, illuminating one and not necessarily an argument to be sustained for each character. Rather, the interpretative approach addresses action in the novel as a totality. Since Tom Joad carries a large proportion of the thematic load of the novel from such a perspective, the bulk of my discussion will focus on him.

Steinbeck's primary thesis, in geographical terms, was that you cannot understand what is going on inside California unless you know what is occurring outside. This notion was borne out by the novel's overwhelming concern with mapping the Joads' migration across the western states. Given the family's goal of obtaining a family-size farm in California, it could be argued that the Joads never really got where they were going. The migration upon which they embarked has no conclusion in the novel other than an ironic symmetry between beginning and ending. The literary "map" charted in *The Grapes of Wrath* was finally not just a geographic product, but was laden with social meaning. It is important, then, to move the line of questioning away from how the Joads got from one place to the next, and by which routes, toward how meaning is produced, controlled, and disseminated with regard to social and workaday space. Also, we need to discover where Steinbeck sat in regard to a general theory of place formation in capitalist society. Specifically, I would like to show how Steinbeck demonstrated his awareness of social/geographic space as the medium and the outcome

of certain processes: the division of labor along class and gender lines; the territorial demands of capitalist agribusiness; and family and community needs to appropriate space for their own production, reproduction, and private fulfillment. These processes, conditioned by the modern era, were brought to bear on the Joads' travails as they encountered the wider social world and it, in turn, received or resisted their arrival.

In a sense my outlook may be criticized as too economic. Let me state at the onset that I am familiar with some of the common cultural and ideological idioms of Steinbeck's work, including the myth of the garden, the family farm as a *reformist* ideal, and the closeness of women to nature. While Steinbeck appeared to have left these myths intact, and indeed to have relied upon them, he dismantled others of a specific local and regional character: the innocence of California's agricultural bounty, the myth of an egalitarian frontier in the West, and the family farm as a basic unit of democracy. Instead of treating each of the above concepts explicitly, I will simply let them inform my thinking, drawing on them as necessary or appropriate.

Steinbeck, I think, *structured* the meanings of the places in which the book's characters were situated on two levels. First, each place took on meaning through its dynamic relationship with an opposite kind of place, either real or imagined. Second, the interaction of these polarities transformed or overturned social relations.

How can two places "interact"? Contradictions among the processes of the division of labor, capitalist agribusiness, and small social units arise as each asserts its territorial demands for space—critical to its very continuation—and brings the novel's places and characters into a dialectical relationship. With the notion of dialectically interacting places in mind, I would, then, posit three sets of oppositions which typify the relationships among the primary settings in *The Grapes of Wrath*. These oppositions constitute major literary devices through which Steinbeck represented the processes of the creation of social/geographic space. The three sets of oppositions are:

1. The tension between places where power is centered—or represented—and places of socially marginal activity for peripheralized people;
2. The contradiction between California as a visible, knowable, Edenic landscape and the Joads' invisibility and ignorance within it;
3. The conflict between divergent modes of transforming nature and producing humane habitats.



California growers' exploitation of migrant laborers in the 1930s was made possible by support from public authorities. In this illustration from the Limited Editions Club edition of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), Thomas Hart Benton portrays a state policeman halting the Joad family truck. The police were assisting Tulare County farmers by convoying "scabs" through picket lines set up by striking field workers. Courtesy The Limited Editions Club and the Steinbeck Research Center, San Jose State University

Places of Centralized Power and Marginalized Activity.

The geography of power and disenfranchisement is relatively straightforward in *The Grapes of Wrath*. A primary distinction is drawn between towns and banks, on the one hand, and Routes 66/99 and the migrant camps on the other hand. The implication, which comprised the fundamental antagonists in Steinbeck's book, was that finance capital, fixed in places (the banks), and the entrenched urban settlement pattern were both hostile to the "independent" and dispossessed rural smallholder and migrant worker. Oklahoma banks extended their domain to foreclose on small or mid-size farms, while California towns resisted the onslaught of the displaced migrants. Migrant families were thus pushed from two directions: away from their homelands and away from the small-town sanctuary of the farmers and merchants. Bankers, big farmers, and town-dwellers alike feared that the Joads would find a place in which to belong. Fixity translated into power, whereas uprootedness was the best assurance of continued disenfranchisement. From this point, Steinbeck wrote what might be called a drama of settlement.

The settlement drama has two dimensions in the novel. In one, Steinbeck imagined a reinvention of a natural, organic society formed by the exigencies of the highway life along the "Great American Roadside." This new, transitional society both chal-

lenged and rivaled the exclusive claims to authenticity held by the historically validated, pre-existing settlement pattern, in which moral authority and political power were vested in fixed centers, either towns or farms. Steinbeck reversed this notion and outlined a vision of moral purity and impending political power as they were taking shape on the road:

The cars of the migrant people crawled out of the side roads onto the great cross-country highway, and they took the migrant way to the West. In the daylight they scuttled like bugs to the westward: and as the dark caught them, they clustered like bugs near to shelter and to water . . . Thus it might be that one family camped near a spring, and another camped for the spring and for company, and a third because two families had pioneered the place and found it good. And when the sun went down, perhaps twenty families and twenty cars were there.

In the evening a strange thing happened: the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all . . .

Every night relationships that make a world, established; and every morning the world torn down like a circus . . . gradually the technique of building worlds became their technique. Then leaders emerged, then laws were made, then codes came into being . . . (p. 264-5).

Steinbeck wrote into the situation a sort of moral

regeneration of American society, borne on the backs of its most beleaguered members. At first, the new society seemed a parody, a "circus", but it was simply that the basic social rules, forgotten by the dominant society, must be learned anew. This proposed change was resisted by those who were socially well-placed: the haves against the have-nots. A manifestation and medium for this struggle was the new spatial form of social relations overlaid on the landscape of the new, depression-era West:

The families, which had been units of which the boundaries were a house at night, a farm by day, changed their boundaries. In the long hot light, they were silent in the cars moving slowly westward; but at night they integrated with any group they found.

Thus they changed their social life—changed as in the whole universe only man can change. They were not farm men any more, but migrant men (p. 267-8).

The struggle to which Steinbeck implicitly alluded, at this point in the novel, was one over legacy, over historical authenticity, over the notion of "free" land in the West. Migrant culture stretched out into a great protective net across the roads of the west. No longer was land the democratizing element. Rather, geographical mobility was the great social leveler, because its laws had been revised to accommodate lives as lived on the road. In the new landscape, the trucker was the benefactor. Steinbeck was enamored of the new roadside culture—the diner, the truckers, the truckstops—just as he ridiculed its transgressors—the fee campgrounds, the salesmen peddling used cars for ill-gotten profits.

The other dimension of the settlement fantasy is the raising of individualized forms of consciousness to the level of class. Steinbeck wrote that "one man, one family [is] driven from the land." The single migrant is "alone . . . and bewildered." But then something happens. Two men meet, "squat on their hams and the women and children listen. . . ." This meeting, Steinbeck pointed out, is the "mode" of revolution. "Here 'I lost my land' is changed . . . [to] 'We lost *our* land.'" (p. 206). Steinbeck continued the reasoning in the succeeding passages to foretell a day of revolution, unforeseen by large propertied interests because they were still in an "I" frame of mind, not yet liberated into communal consciousness.

The author presented a pattern of fragmentation of the rural freeholder class which moved toward a portentous regrouping on the road. The road in this role is transformed from nemesis to necessity,

if history is to follow the contradictory logic of modernization. Yet the road maintained ambiguous status in the novel. It beckoned at the same time as it restrained.

Route 66 was essential for the formation of the migrants' new social consciousness, yet for all its symbolic and cultural weight, it led the Joads down a circular path in their search for house and garden. After the Joads' scrape with the law in the first California "Hooverville" they came to, they made a narrow pre-dawn escape *down* Route 99. It is tempting to think that Steinbeck was manipulating the route numbers themselves to reveal their symbolic content (p. 384). Turning south on "99" inverted the route number to "66." The Joads were far from home, but essentially on the same highway that used to lead to their old front door.

The Joads' Invisibility and Ignorance within a Visible, Edenic Landscape.

A critical juncture in the book arrived as the Joads were astride the top of the Tehachapi Mountains, looking out over the Central Valley toward Bakersfield. They had just endured the disappointment of Needles ("Gateway to California"), a funeral procession through the Mojave Desert, and the agricultural inspection station at Daggett:

Al jammed on the brake and stopped in the middle of the road, and, "Jesus Christ! Look!" he said. The vineyards, the orchards, the great flat valley, green and beautiful, the trees set in rows, and the farm houses . . . The distant cities, the little towns in the orchard land, and morning sun, golden on the valley . . . The grain fields golden in the morning, and the willow lines, the eucalyptus trees in rows.

Pa sighed, "I never knowed they was anything like her."

. . . Ruthie and Winfield scrambled down from the car, and then they stood, silent and awestruck, embarrassed before the great valley . . . and Ruthie whispered, "It's California" (p. 309-10).

This moment, when they were faced with the spectacle of California, was foreshadowed in the novel when the Joads took a respite outside Needles. Tom Joad wondered then whether the image of California would pan out in reality: Pa said, "Wait till we get to California. You'll see nice country then." Tom admonished, "Jesus Christ, Pa! This here *is* California" (p. 278).

Moments later Tom talked with a man versed in the subtler aspects of the California landscape. He told Tom what to expect, and although he was leaving California, he encouraged Tom to go see for himself:

"She's a nice country. But she was stole a long time ago. You git acrost the desert an' come into the country aroun' Bakersfield. An' you never seen such purty country—all orchards an' grapes, purtiest country you ever seen. An' you'll pass lan' flat an' fine with water thirty feet down, and that lan's layin' fallow. But you can't have none of that lan'. That's a Lan' and Cattle Company. An' if they don't want ta work her, she ain't gonna git worked. You go in there an' plant you a little corn, an' you'll go to jail!" (p. 279)

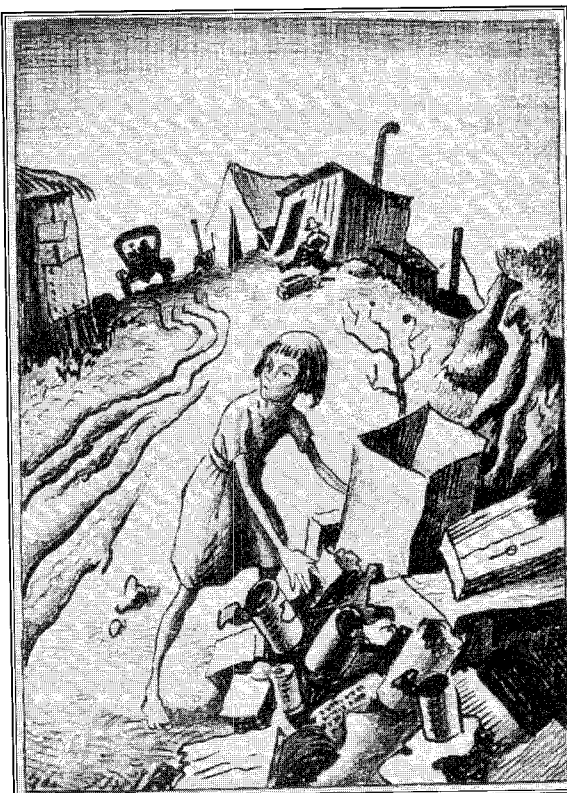
The migrants had seen pictures of California—a rural paradise draped with a snow capped background (p. 271). In the scenes depicted above the Joads are brought to confront and question that image. But even when the visible landscape seemed to fit the pictorial myth, the social and economic reality had brutal implications. The landscape, a spectacle, as presented to the observer from the crest of the Tehachapis, concealed the enveloping contradiction between the subsistence potential of the soil and the monopolistic tendencies of the large landowning companies.

Still, however, the Joads asserted their blind, almost masochistic fortitude, (that evidence of the survival instinct bordering on animal drive—bugs "crawl," the Joads "crawl") which flew in the face of everything they had heard along their migration. They were distrustful of "words" and "talk":

[Uncle John by the riverbank outside of Needles] ". . . We're a-goin' there, ain't we? None of this here talk gonna keep us from goin' there. When we get there, we'll get there. When we get a job we'll work, an' when we don't get a job we'll set on our tail. This here talk ain't gonna do no good no way" (p. 283).

Indeed, Uncle John foresaw the truth of their experience in the great valley. Yet he could not have seen any of the particular features and would not have been able to map out the continuation of their journey from the vantage point at the pass in the Tehachapis. The crisis of representation here had two expressions. One was the inability of the Joads to convey to each other what they were getting themselves into. The other expression of the crisis was the very landscape that lay before them. The power of the landscape, to represent future events as they would be shaped by social/power relations and to lend predictability to the migrants' lives, rapidly diminished. The landscape ambiguously revealed *and* concealed its contents. All along, the Joads had been making the equation between the visible and the possible, between reality and representation. The notions of "there" and "here" as points on a map, or as elements of the field of vision that could be identified and reached, were continually obscured because the Joads were lured in the first place by the spectacle of California. Or,

Thomas Hart Benton's rendition of one of California's "Hoovervilles," ramshackled Depression-era settlements on the outskirts of rural and urban communities that sheltered tens of thousands of Dust-Bowl migrants like Steinbeck's Joad family. Courtesy The Limited Editions Club and the Steinbeck Research Center, San Jose State University



rather, California was revealed to them only as a spectacle. What they found, in fact, was a parallel, though peripheralized, world.

The apotheosis of the peripheral world was the Hooverville. A parody of the American small-town ideal and a continuation of Steinbeck's settlement myth, these squatter settlements could be found outside of every "real" town: "The rag town lay close to water; and the houses were tents, and weed-thatched enclosures, paper houses, a great junk pile" (p. 319-20). The "rag town" was really nothing but the discharge point of the effluvia of the social order: "a great junk pile." The description alluded to the flow of goods, but the Hooverville made a mockery of real economic exchange. The flow of goods was uni-directional. And the settlement was illusory—houses were merely tents and paper constructions.

Yet it was in Hooverville that the Joads comprehended the basic contradictions that drove the plot forward. The migrant camp on the outskirts followed the "mother of invention" dictum, but the camp was an essential geographical instrument for concentrating surplus labor in a region where one extensively planted crop ripened all at once over a broad area. In Hooverville, Tom Joad is lectured to by a world-wise, old hand about how the gathering of surplus workers enabled employers to pay miserable wages. "S'pose them men got kids . . . Jus' offer 'em a nickel—why, they'll kill each other fightin' for that nickel." The men had been lured by handbills, and "You can print a hell of a lot of han'bills with what ya save payin' fifteen cents an hour for fiel' work," explained Tom's instructor. He continued:

"They's a big son-of-a-bitch of a peach orchard I worked in. Takes nine men all the year roun'." He paused impressively. "Takes three thousan' men for two weeks when them peaches is ripe . . . They send out han'bills all over hell. They need three thousan', an' they get six thousan' . . . Whole part a the country's peaches. All ripe together. When ya get 'em picked, ever' goddam one is picked. There ain't another damn thing in that part a the country to do. An' then them owners don' want you there no more. . . . So they kick you out, they move you along. That's how it is" (p. 334-5).

The California spectacle was revealed as a horrific production racket involving key combinations: a division of labor with a painfully seasonal and spatial underpinning, extensive mono-cropping, and the short term needs of migrant families and individuals to keep the diurnal body and soul together. Although any *one* Hooverville was a temporary arrangement in the migrant world, Hoover-

villes were to be found on the edge of every town. Each was fragile over time. Over geographical space they were extensive and threatening. Thus, they had their hand in a dialectical turn of events: "every raid on a Hooverville, every deputy swaggering through a ragged camp put off the day a little and cemented the inevitability of the day [when the land will belong to the workers]" (p. 325).

Just as the Joads were awed and inspired (*embarrassed* too) by the view of the landscape from atop the Tehachapis—a vision of an ordered, productive, and beneficent world—the owners of property, the producers of that landscape and the image of California as a haven for the dispossessed, wished to keep the migrants moving. The landscape itself was to be a fixed, closed entity, and the idea of keeping the outcasts moving was to keep from thinking of them as part of the real picture. The point was to define the laborer merely as a means of production rather than as inheritor of the rewards of an agrarian tradition, one of which would be the very privilege of belonging to the landscape by being a landholder.

Steinbeck attached a particular form of consciousness-historical knowledge—to land ownership. Ironically, it is the great landowner who understands the lesson that when there are masses of dispossessed, revolution will surely follow. But workers need to grasp their role in the historical process. How does the worker in *The Grapes of Wrath* come into that consciousness? How do the Joads as peasants know that they have become "workers"?

The Joads were not ascribed any potential for social mobility. In addition, their spatial mobility was almost thoroughly restricted, if not prescribed. Thus, a plunge into the self brought about a realized relationship to history and society. In spatial terms, seclusion was required. Steinbeck carefully chose places that gave a character a renewed and empowering vantage point from which to see social relations as fraught with contradictions (p. 571-2). Characters must be placed in a position from which to view their world upside down, with the social order reversed. Invariably, these places were marginal, both in the productivity of nature and in the hierarchy of human habitats.

Divergent Modes of Transforming Nature and the Production of Humane Habitats.

Steinbeck tried to capture the historical place and time in which putting land into production meant different things to different classes of people. The primary event that set *The Grapes*

of *Wrath* in motion was the Joads' loss of their homestead to a bank that foreclosed on the property. Steinbeck drew a fundamental distinction between a spatial proximity of a people to their land and, conversely, a spatial disjunction:

[Muley Graves] "Place where folks live is them folks. They ain't whole, out lonely on the road in a piled-up car. They ain't alive no more. Them sons-a-bitches killed 'em' " (p. 71).

[Later, a fragment from an interchapter] The man who is . . . walking on the earth, turning his plow point for a stone, dropping his handles to slide over an outcropping, kneeling in the earth to eat his lunch; that man who is more than his elements knows the land that is more than its analysis. But the machine man, driving a dead tractor on land he does not know and love, understands only chemistry; and he is contemptuous of the land and of himself. When the corrugated iron doors are shut, he goes home, and his home is not the land (p. 158).

Steinbeck was very keen on establishing the notion that an emotional relationship to land depends on close physical contact with the soil. Because Muley Graves did not join the Joads, he failed to recognize the opportunity for renewal in the experience of migration. However, he *was* clever enough to recognize the ways and means of survival in a land wholly given over to an alien system of agricultural production. In an early scene on the old Joad homestead, Muley explained to Tom and Casy the fine art of hiding in a land where there was supposedly nowhere to hide (p. 77-8). Cotton had been planted so extensively at the old farm that it likened flushing out the fugitives to looking for a needle in a haystack. To a degree, their invisibility in the cotton field opposed the inability of the small farmer to pin the responsibility of foreclosure on a real *person*. Each side was a stranger to the other. The modern system divided them, as it brought them together.

Ultimately "tractor farming" became the small landholder's nemesis. The small farmer could no longer make the land support a crop. Under a system of modernized production, extensive monocropping of cotton engulfed the Joads' farm.

The Reverend Casy and young Tom stood on the hill and looked down on the Joad place. The small unpainted house was mashed at one corner, and it had been pushed off its foundations so that it slumped at an angle, its blind front windows pointing at a spot of sky well above the horizon. The fences were gone and the cotton grew in the dooryard and up against the house, and the cotton grew close against it . . . They walked toward the

concrete well-cap, walked through cotton plants to get to it, and the bolls were forming on the cotton, and the land was cultivated (p. 54-5).

In a number of such passages Steinbeck brought together potent images of two rural orders in conflict. The new large cotton farm annihilated all former distinctions between the various micro-places of the Joad farm: no more fences, no dooryard, no clear path to shed, outhouse, or trough. There were no places even for "proper weeds that should grow under a trough." The phrase "proper weeds" seems like an oxymoron, yet gets the point across that the old rough and tumble homestead was part of a good and natural scheme.

It was such a scheme that the Joads and others dreamed of reproducing in their exile. The idea that land should be used and occupied, rather than left fallow, was stymied, however, by the power of the large landowner to let arable land remain idle:

. . . And along the roads lay the temptations, the fields that could bear food.

That's owned. That ain't our'n.

Well, maybe we could get a little piece of her. Maybe—a little piece. Right down there—a patch. Jimson weed now. Christ, I could git enough potato-tatoes off'n that little patch to feed my whole family!

It ain't our'n. It got to have Jimson weeds (p. 320-1).

Any attempts to cultivate the "secret gardens" fail—unless the New Deal intervenes (p. 321). Outside of Bakersfield the federal government established the migrant labor camp, Weedpatch.

Weedpatch is reminiscent of both the "secret gardens" and the "rag town" Hoovervilles. The government camp provided momentary respite, even appeared idyllic. Yet in the final analysis it was little more than a glorified sanitary facility and could not support the desire for a permanent, humane habitat:

Tom walked down the street between the rows of tents . . . He saw that the rows were straight and that there was no litter about the tents. The ground of the street had been swept and sprinkled . . . Tom walked slowly. He neared Number Four Sanitary Unit and he looked at it curiously, an unpainted building, low and rough (p. 393).

Weedpatch was the vector of several important themes in the novel. It drew on the idea of geometric orderliness and cleanliness as support for the moral authority of the American small town. Its setting resonated with a secure and bounded rural propriety. It was a point from which the power of the migrant "folk" could emanate amidst the enveloping enterprise of agribusiness. Most



Thomas Hart Benton's drawing of a dance for residents of the federal camp for migrant workers at Weedpatch.

Government camps, though designed only for temporary housing, provided a measure of protection for the Dust-Bowl refugees. Local vigilantes opposed to the "Okies'" presence were foiled in their plot to disrupt this particular dance in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Courtesy The Limited Editions Club and the Steinbeck Research Center, San Jose State University

powerfully, Weedpatch was the overlapping space of three "institutions": the short term needs of the migrant workers, federal relief policy, and large-scale capitalist agriculture. For all its importance in bringing these systems together, however, Weedpatch remained a marginal place. It was a holding area for the worker in a place where employment was scarce after the harvest. Inside, the migrant community was strong and thwarted the attempts of local vigilantes to incite a riot. Ultimately, though, it was agribusiness that set the rules. The Joads and others like them were forced to leave and look for work.

If the "secret garden" failed to sustain the myth of yeoman independence, Steinbeck experimented with the notion that it is in the seams, or cracks, in the agricultural landscape (the in-between places where the *process*, rather than the final outcome, of the appropriation of nature can be viewed), where the self can retreat and become empowered through contact with nature, fragmentary though it may be. In *The Grapes of Wrath* this idea was expressed in the context of the agricultural production process. In this way Steinbeck located in a specific time and place what otherwise would be an ahistorical notion. He took pains to explain that modern farming in Oklahoma and California entailed forms of subordination and social control

(p. 50-1; 316-20). Steinbeck's whole point, of course, was to suggest how these consequences can be resisted.

In order to understand how these arguments work in the novel, we can examine certain events as they occur in irrigation ditches and hedgerows—two types of seams, or cracks, in the agricultural landscape that represent gaps in apparently seamless power relations.

Tom Joad, the primary character of the novel, experienced two baptisms in irrigation ditches. The first was performed by Casy when Tom was a boy and Casy a revivalist preacher. His first baptism did not mean too much to young Tom. Its meaning only became clear when Tom was *re-baptized*—this time by himself—after doing something out of conviction and a sense of social justice. In this scene, Tom's actions were less blind, more than merely the result of the things that he was always bumping into. Tom had just discovered Casy and a number of other labor organizers. In a scuffle with a group of vigilantes who were tailing them down a stream, Casy was killed. Tom fatally struck down the killer, was himself struck, and made his escape up the embankment:

He bent low and ran over the cultivated earth; clods slipped and rolled under his feet. Ahead he saw the bushes that bounded the field, bushes

along the edges of an irrigation ditch. He slipped through the fence, edged in among vines and blackberry bushes. And then he lay still, panting hoarsely He lay still on his stomach until his mind came back. And then he crawled slowly over the edge of the ditch. He bathed his face in the cool water

The black cloud had crossed the sky, a blob of dark against the stars. The night was quiet again (p. 527-8).

This second "baptism" was more figurative and secular than the first, but Steinbeck meant them to be parallel events. In each instance Tom and Casy were present. In each case Tom's baptism followed some form of violence. The first baptism occurred under conditions which were too naive to lend any meaning to Tom's life. The second, however, marked his passage into a period of solitary resolve and spiritual rekindling. For the moment he was emancipated—"The black cloud had crossed the sky The night was quiet again." That the baptisms occurred in irrigation ditches was simply consistent with the setting of the story. Yet their location has something to say about sites of spiritual renewal and resistance in a space of seemingly total social control.

The irrigation ditch is an essential feature and instrument of agriculture in a semi-arid environment. It is part and parcel of the transformation of nature, and hence, of the production and labor process (one of the few jobs Tom gets is digging an irrigation ditch). The ditch of the second baptism is at the field's edge, protected by water-seeking bushes. As much as it represents evidence of the dominant class's mastery over nature, it remains its own kind of environment, with water so elemental that its restorative properties are unsullied. The water, unlike the social and economic system that manipulates it, is not selective about to whom it gives life.

The second environment of solitary reflection, and precursor to resistance, is the hedgerow at the margins of the cotton fields. Like the irrigation ditches these micro-environments help build the novel's architectural symmetry. And similarly they see Tom's movement from a state of partial denial to affirmation of his role in social change. Twice the reader finds Tom Joad hiding at the edges of cotton fields. The first time is with Muley Graves at the Joads' old farm, when Tom and Casy follow Muley



By the end of *The Grapes of Wrath*, California's agricultural system had stripped the Joads and other Dust-Bowl migrants of their pride and possessions and reduced them to primitive survival. A great storm finally swamped their truck and flooded them out of the abandoned boxcars in which they had taken refuge. Illustration by Thomas Hart Benton. Courtesy The Limited Editions Club and the Steinbeck Research Center, San Jose State University

to a place where they can stay the night. It turns out to be a cave in the bank of a water-cut. "... Joad settled himself on the clean sand. 'I ain't gonna sleep in no cave,' he said. 'I'm gonna sleep right here.' He rolled his coat and put it under his head" (p. 81-2).

Tom is in hiding despite his pride and deliberations to the contrary, but he falls short of entering the cave as Muley does. The scene presages Tom's future exile in a similar situation in California: Muley warns Tom that he will be hiding "from lots of stuff." Tom himself dug the cave at the edge of the field when he was a youth "Lookin' for gold"—what more appropriate place in which to end up than California at the edge of a cotton field.

After Tom escapes with this family from the peach orchard (where they were working at the time of Casy's death), Muley's prediction comes true:

Al turned right on a graveled road, and the yellow lights shuddered over the ground. The fruit trees were gone now, and cotton plants took their place. They drove on for *twenty miles* [italics mine] through the cotton . . . The road paralleled a bushy creek and turned over a concrete bridge and followed the stream on the other side. And then, on the edge of the creek the lights showed a long line of red box-cars, wheelless; and a big sign on the edge of the road said, "Cotton Pickers Wanted." Al slowed down . . .

"... Look," he [Tom] said. "It says they want cotton pickers. I seen that sign. Now I been tryin' to figger how I'm gonna stay with you, an' not make no trouble. When my face gets well, maybe it'll be awright, but not now. Ya see them cars back there. Well, the pickers live in them. Now maybe they's work there. How about if you get work there an' live in one of the them cars?"

"How 'bout you?" Ma demanded.

"Well, you seen that crick, all full a brush. Well, I could hide in that brush an' keep outa sight. An' at night you could bring me out somepin to eat. I seen a culvert, little ways back. I could maybe sleep in there" (p. 550-1).

While Tom was secure in the hedgerow above the creek by the cotton field, he could not only reflect on the recent events, but represent them to his mother in their full meaning. In his hiding place he found his kinship to a humanity beyond the family boundary, and came into a sense of overarching social purpose. Steinbeck intimated that Tom would follow in Casy's steps (p. 570).

By repeating the hiding pattern established earlier in the novel, Steinbeck foreshadowed the internal change in Tom's character. Steinbeck played seclusion and personal empowerment against the geographically extensive and demoralizing agricultural

working conditions. The spatial reach of agribusiness in the thirties, which seems to have levelled the distinction between one worker and another, is shown in *The Grapes of Wrath* to have enough cracks to allow certain people to individuate themselves. These cracks reflect on the contradictions of the production process, sustaining the idea of unexploited nature as a reserve for the human spirit during historically specific and dehumanizing conditions. Thus, Tom Joad had to be alone in a *particular kind of space*, in a special relationship with nature, before he could realize that, after all, he is part of a social group, of an historical moment—before he could grant authority to the representational and political value of language.

In *The Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck appeared to praise the values and unswerving pragmatism of the migrant workers and families. Through Tom Joad, however, who finally discovered in his hideout that talking, thinking, and language are worthy tools for understanding practical predicaments, Steinbeck also criticized the shortcomings of the Joad family's "common sense," in which discussion and the very idea of representation seemed overly precious. What the Joads needed instead was to recognize the value of representation—not as learned in myth, but as relearned in the kinds of spaces where the individual can represent first to himself, then to others, a version of reality closer to the truth. In order for the human family to unite, the boundaries of the nuclear family had to be loosened. Ma Joad's "fambly" could not remain intact. She realized that, while her family had land, they were a bounded, cohesive entity. Without it they were falling apart (p. 536). However, only through their disintegration would they really think and act beyond themselves.

Finally, we are left to wonder how Steinbeck ultimately appraised the situation of the "Okie" migrant worker. To his credit Steinbeck did not see the migrant class as a monolith, but rather as differentiated. For example, toward the conclusion of the novel Ma and Pa Joad have taken divergent, gender-based viewpoints. Pa became preoccupied with looking backwards, so nostalgic for a time when he was head of the household division of labor that he could not participate in the present. Ma was forward looking, acknowledging that the land in California was, after all, better than their Oklahoma farmland. She rose from the ashes of a burnt-out household, the vehicle for Steinbeck to expose the pitfalls of patriarchy. Pa remained stuck in the historical moment, if not in the past itself.




Rose of Sharon, sister of Tom Joad, the leading character, in *The Grapes of Wrath*. One of the major themes in Steinbeck's novel was the manner in which economic inequality and exploitation undermined the status of men, who earned self-respect by being "breadwinners." On the other hand, women, according to Steinbeck, were less ego-involved in the economic productive system, more in touch with spiritual and life-giving forces of nature, and thus more adaptable to adversity. Reflecting this theme, in the novel's heart-rending, enigmatic, and controversial conclusion, Rose of Sharon, who had just suffered the still-birth of her child, suckled a starving strange man at her breast in order to save his life. Courtesy *The Limited Editions Club* and the Steinbeck Research Center, San Jose State University

Ma, as a woman, adapted readily to changing situations, accepting life as a "flow." However, the positions ascribed to Ma and Pa are not based on an ahistorical sense of masculine and feminine. For both Pa's nostalgia and Ma's philosophy of "flow" were occasioned by their entrapment in an historical and geographical flux. It was Ma, while still in Oklahoma, who first experienced nostalgic attachments. The tragedy of the migrants' situation, therefore, seems not so much that they had to leave home, but that California did not yet offer the permanent place they thought it promised.

Steinbeck took the view that migrant workers were caught in a complex of relations modernizing the western states, that the particular features of their experience also depended on the forms of consciousness and practice that they brought to situations, and that rules and ideologies set by modern capitalism also relied in part on a laboring class such as the Joads represented. I have suggested that Steinbeck was keenly aware that the division of labor, agricultural production within capitalist agribusiness and the family farm, and the consciousness of individuals and social groups,

all had requirements that grew out of and were projected onto contradicting geographical spaces. The particular oppositional motifs, a series of tensions, that I think Steinbeck used to convey his argument, were: the spaces of power and disenfranchisement, the ambiguity of the landscape as a depicting *and* concealing agent, and the conflicting modes of transforming nature.

These oppositional motifs were the means by which Steinbeck created a space for certain characters to resist the oppressing forces. The Joads were never completely marginalized; power was not *all* powerful. The attempts to make the Joads invisible in the landscape, a cog in the production process, contributed in some sense to their redemption. Nature was never entirely mastered nor subdued, and it was by virtue of its transformation by the class in power that restorative gaps were left. 

See "References" beginning on page 262.

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IV. Policy

The “New” California

by Dan Walters

The very term “twenty-first century” conjures up celluloid images of robots performing household chores or space travelers dressed in funny costumes. But the twenty-first century is just around the corner, and social, economic, technological, and demographic forces already being felt in California will shape its reality.

Change is California’s only constant, and whatever the state has been in the past and whatever it is today, it will be different tomorrow. Those who prepare themselves for those changes—most importantly those youngsters who are entering the school system now—will survive and perhaps prosper. Those who are ill-prepared will, in the harshly competitive socioeconomic environment developing in California, fall by the wayside, destined for low-paid, dead-end jobs. This year’s second-graders are the high school graduating class of 2000, although experience tells us that quite a few of them will not make it.

To fully understand what is happening in California and what is likely to occur between now and 2000, one must also understand what has happened in the recent past, ever since California was jerked out of its semi-agrarian slumber by World War II. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor forced

America, for the first time, to pay attention to what we now call the Pacific Rim, but then called the Pacific Theater of Operations. The nation was compelled, in effect, to look westward toward the East and that meant California, which became the staging area for the war in the Pacific. Overnight, it seemed, California became an industrial powerhouse, filled with the aircraft factories, shipyards, and other installations needed for the war effort. Simultaneously, hundreds of thousands of persons came into the state to work in the war industries or to undergo military training.

The war touched off an extended period of economic and human growth in California that has continued, with a few brief lulls, for nearly a half-century. The state’s cities developed suburban appendages that bulged with people. It is hard to believe now, but Anaheim had just 32,000 residents—about the size of Ridgcrest—when Walt Disney chose it as the site of his Kingdom ruled by a fictional mouse. It became a staple quip of television comedians that just about everyone in California was born somewhere else, most often in a midwestern or southwestern state. It was a slap-happy period in California, the two decades that followed World War II. Job opportunities were



Kids, Yettem (1984). Hispanic children, pictured here in the San Joaquin Valley town of Yettem, are part of the future of the "new" California.
Photograph by Stephen Johnson



The Harbor Freeway in downtown Los Angeles, shortly after opening, 1954. The early freeways dramatically changed California's cities after the 1940s. Today, skyscrapers have sprouted up in downtown Los Angeles, and enormous population growth and urban sprawl in the region have made its forty-year-old roads obsolete. *Courtesy California Department of Transportation*

expanding, people were coming into the state from everywhere, homes were being occupied even before the paint had dried, and everywhere one looked, new freeways, schools, and colleges were being built.

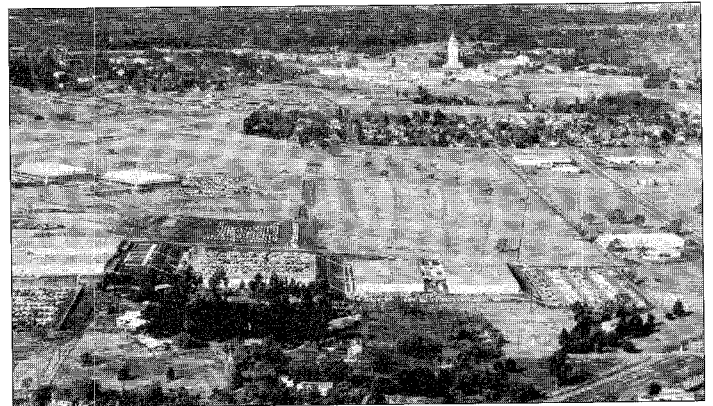
But even as California basked in industrial prosperity, there were signs of the coming socioeconomic and demographic change. Some young engineers, working in their garages, were putting together the first solid-state computers. Japan, which had been devastated by World War II, was beginning to send a few of its cars to California, cars with funny shapes and even funnier names. And some businessmen in New York, Chicago, Akron, and Detroit were beginning to pull back, beginning to close or pare down those industrial plants that had sprouted like weeds in California.

The period of rapid industrialization that had transformed the California landscape was beginning to give way to a new kind of economy, a post-industrial hybrid economy rooted in services, in trade with the nations of the Pacific Rim, and in certain kinds of highly specialized manufacturing, much of it connected to space exploration and military needs. Many industrial plants, unable to compete in a global economy, shut down, even as the state's economic power was growing to nation-like dimensions. One statistic illustrates that trend:

between 1972 and 1987 there was an 85 percent decrease in the number of Californians working in the tire-manufacturing industry, as all but one of the state's tire plants shut down; but there was a 100 percent increase in the number of hotel workers. Californians are buying just as many tires as before—many more, in fact—but more and more of those tires are being built in other states or, more likely, in other nations.

In a sense, what's happening to California is exactly what many Easterners always thought would happen: the state is falling off the edge of the continent, at least in economic and social terms. It is becoming disconnected from the rest of the nation as it assumes a pivotal role in the emerging Pacific Rim economy; what happens in Tokyo or Mexico City may well have more impact on California than what occurs in Washington or New York.

As California's economic transformation began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, so did a transformation in California's population. Population growth slowed markedly in the 1970s. The state, which had surpassed New York to become the nation's most populous in the 1960s, was still growing at a fairly rapid clip, but slower than it had been. The industrial job opportunities that had attracted so many from other states had become fewer. But in the late 1970s, population growth picked up again. California's post-industrial economy was as attractive to immigrants from other nations as its industrial economy had been to immigrants from other states. During the first eight years of the 1970s California created some three



Lockheed Missile and Space Division, with Stanford University in background, Santa Clara County, in the 1950s. Since the 1940s, California's electronics, aerospace, and defense industries have been closely related to the state's educational and research institutions. *CHS Library, San Francisco*

million new jobs, more than all of western Europe. The state became the destination of choice for millions of immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and dozens of other global locales, seeking economic and personal opportunity. California became the new American melting pot, with dozens of languages—100 spoken in Los Angeles area schools alone—and hundreds of cultural strains. The state became, in short, the most culturally complex society ever seen on the face of the Earth. Only in California would one find, as he can in mid-town Los Angeles, a Kosher burrito stand operated by an immigrant from Korea.

During the 1980s, California has experienced astonishing population growth, from 24 million to 29 million and still climbing toward an estimated 35 million by 2000. California's growth in this decade has represented a quarter of all the population growth experienced in the United States, and in some years it has been as much as one-half. The current population-growth rate is nearly 2,000 people a day, half of them immigrants and most of the remainder the offspring of recent immigrant groups. As one might expect, virtually all of that growth is among non-Anglo peoples. The Asian

population of California has doubled in the last decade. Enrollment in the state's elementary and high schools is increasing by 140,000 youngsters a year, and in 1988, for the first time, a majority of the state's K-12 students were non-Anglo, which also underscores the fact that the non-Anglo population is markedly younger than the Anglo population.

Effectively, California's population growth has been a two-staged phenomenon. The newcomers to California are settling in its central cities. Los Angeles is more than 35 percent Hispanic already, for example. And as that occurs, Anglo Californians continue to flee into the suburbs. But the first tier of suburbs, such as Orange County and the San Fernando Valley in southern California and Santa Clara and Contra Costa counties in the north, are giving away to a second tier. What seems to be happening is that as California's economy continues to undergo its conversion, jobs have become more portable. It is easier, for example, to move an insurance claims processing operation than it is a steel mill. And those jobs moved out of the central cities and into the suburbs.

The suburban areas that had experienced rapid



San Francisco's Japanese American community celebrates the Japan Festival, ca. 1974. California's long-time Chinese American and Japanese American residents have been joined by more recent immigrants from Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Korea, as well as newcomers from other countries of Asia and the rest of the world. The state's population and culture are easily the nation's most diverse, creating challenges, as well as great opportunities. *CHS Library, San Francisco*

population growth in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s began to experience slowdowns of population growth—in part because housing costs were skyrocketing—as they felt increases in employment. Twenty years ago, people lived in Orange County and commuted to Los Angeles. Today, increasingly, people live in Riverside County—where one can still find a single-family home for less than \$100,000—and commute into the new employment centers of Orange County. Twenty years from now, they may be living in Barstow and commuting to Riverside.

New development patterns, population growth, and California's nonstop love affair with the automobile, meanwhile, have been creating traffic problems of historic dimensions. While California's population was growing at a rapid clip, its population of vehicles was increasing even faster—a 50 percent increase in the last 12 years alone.

None of these fundamental trends is likely to change in the next generation and thus the California that the graduates of the Class of 2000 face is likely to be:

- a denser society, with well over 30 million people, perhaps as many as 33 million.

- a more culturally and demographically complex society, in which Anglos are likely to become a minority group within a few years.

- a more competitive society with expanding opportunities in managerial, technical, entrepreneurial, and professional fields at the upper end, expanding needs for low-skill service workers at the lower end, and relatively fewer middle-income opportunities; indeed, given the high school drop-out rates among black and Hispanic youngsters, some experts are predicting a shortage of trained and trainable labor in California by about 2010.

- an older society; the over-65 age group is already California's fastest-growing population group, and the aging process will accelerate as the baby boomers—those born between 1946 and 1965—move into middle age and beyond; but it is a phenomenon that is confined largely to the numerically stagnant Anglo population, because immigrants are for the most part young and have relatively high birth rates.

- a more frustrating society; average freeway speeds in Los Angeles are 35 miles per hour now,

and even if every highway project on the books is built, transportation experts say, speeds will decline to 19 mph by 2010.

- perhaps a more dangerous society, given such phenomena as escalating gang warfare in the inner cities and freeway frustration manifesting itself in random acts of violence.

- a more expensive society, especially when it comes to housing; home construction costs and market values are rising far faster than income, meaning that fewer and fewer Californians can afford to buy traditional single-family homes; when the Class of 2000 is ready to enter the home buying market, about 2010, only a few of them will be able to do so, and the vast majority will be compelled to settle for a rented apartment or, at best, a small condominium.

- a more sprawling society; the suburbs will continue to march outward from the central cities as job opportunities continue to spread outward and as Californians continue to search for that most elusive of commodities, the affordable home within commuting distance; already one-time farming communities such as Manteca and Turlock are becoming suburban enclaves, and as jobs become more prevalent in the San Fernando and Antelope valleys, it is not unreasonable to assume that the Bakersfield area will become home to commuters.

- politically, a society that continues to edge rightward as the dominant Anglos (85 percent of the voters) continue to age and vote in a self-protective mode, but one in which the social tensions of the larger society are felt keenly.

And all of that is assuming that California does not have a big earthquake that wipes out everything.

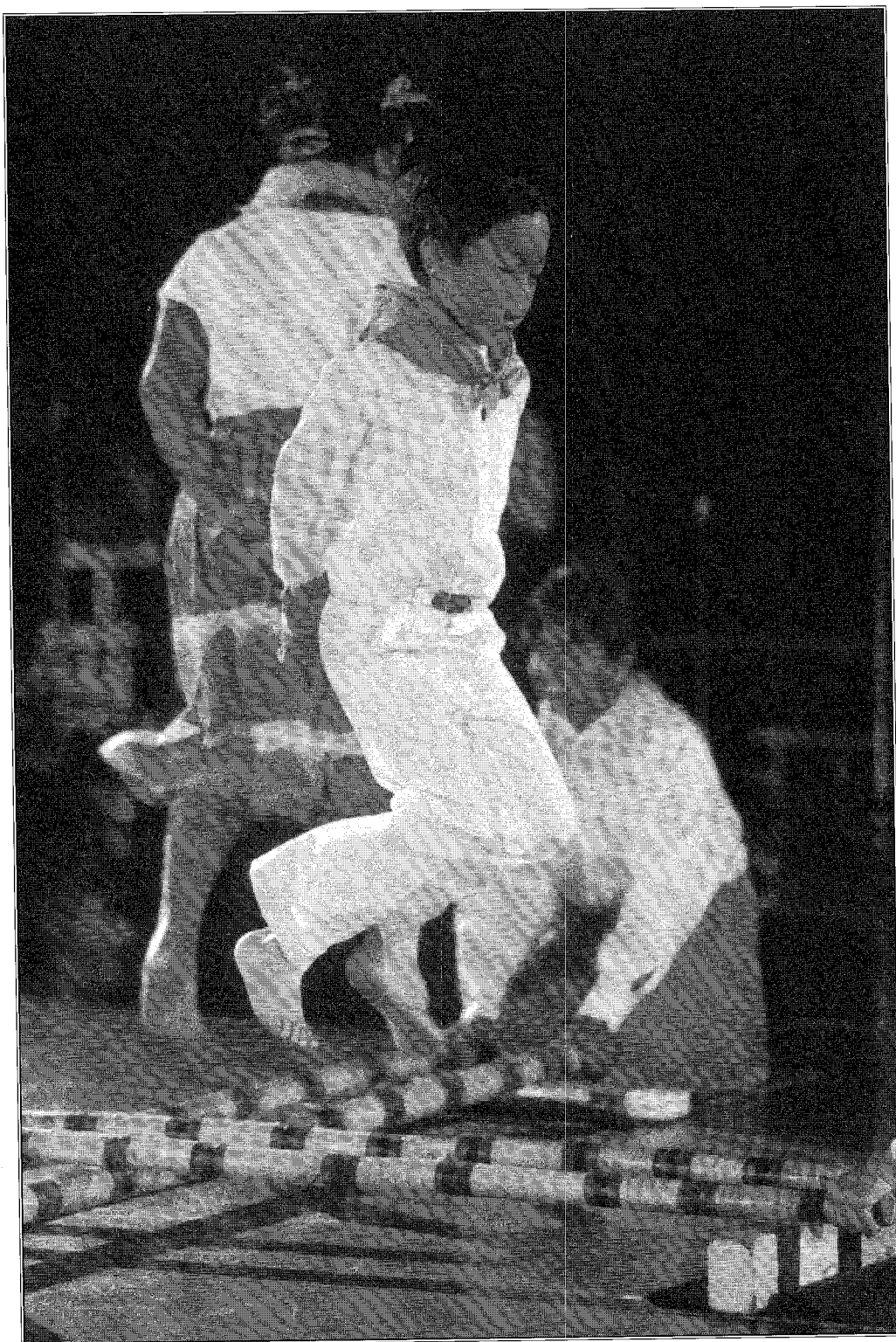
It will be exciting.

CHS

A journalist and author, Dan Walters writes the state's only daily newspaper column devoted to California politics, appearing in The Sacramento Bee and more than 40 California newspapers. He has written extensively for other publications, such as Time, Wall Street Journal, and California Journal. In 1986, California Journal Press published his book, The New California: Facing the 21st Century. He is now writing a book about the California Legislature.



Suburb near Concord looking north from Mt. Diablo, with Suisun Bay at the top, 1984. In the 1970s and 1980s, new development occurred in places that used to be considered remote from cities. Population boomed in desert areas around Los Angeles, such as the Antelope Valley. In the northern San Joaquin Valley, Tracy, Manteca, and Modesto were transformed from farm towns into middle-class suburbs, with residents commuting by car into the San Francisco Bay metropolis. Concord and other northeast Bay Area suburbs spread eastward into the agricultural Delta region.
Photograph by Stephen Johnson



Pioneer Elementary School students doing the "Tinikiling," a dance from the Philippines, at "Marching On," the New Haven School District's annual musical extravaganza in the mid-1980s. The district, in Union City, is typical of California's increasingly ethnically diverse suburban school districts. By 1988, about 70 percent of its 11,500 students were from ethnic minority groups; 25 percent were Hispanic. Sixty languages other than English were spoken in the students' homes, and 15 percent of school children have limited English proficiency. In addition to celebrating the children's ethnic cultures in school programs and district-wide events such as "Marchin On," the New Haven School District, with much community support, offers classroom instruction in English as a second language, Spanish, and other languages. *Photograph by John McNamara*

UNIFORMITY OR DIVERSITY?

Recent Language Policy in California Public Education

by Ronald J. Schmidt

Few public issues generate stronger feelings than does language policy. People seem to care unusually deeply about which languages they speak and hear, and which languages are encouraged or discouraged by the state for use in both public and private discourse. Several years ago this fact was brought home in a tragic way when one young man waiting in line at a southern California fast food restaurant was shot to death by another because he refused to speak to his companion in English rather than in Spanish. While not usually so violent, the intensity of public feeling over language issues is clearly widespread and increasingly volatile for those making public policy for the state. The purpose of this paper is to assess in a systematic way the root issues and value conflicts that underlie battles over language policy in California.

Language policy has been an issue in California at least since the beginning of statehood. Just prior to statehood, of course, Spanish was the dominant language. The defeat of Mexico in the Mexican-American War, however, culminated in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), in which one-third of the defeated nation's territory, including California, was ceded to the United States. Our first state Constitution, adopted in 1850, provided for bilingual public discourse in both Spanish and English, guaranteeing the language rights of the recently annexed Mexican residents of the state. The state's second Constitution, enacted in 1879 following anti-Asian immigrant agitation by the San Francisco-based Workingmen's Party, however, removed the language rights of Spanish-speaking Californians and adopted the "neutral" silence of

the federal law on the question of an "official" language.¹

Following a period of relative quiescence, language policy has again become a "hot" issue in California during the past two decades, particularly with respect to bilingual education and so-called "bilingual ballots." Signifying the increased feeling about the issue, the state's voters in 1986 overwhelmingly adopted a constitutional amendment (Proposition 63 on the November ballot) making English the sole "official" language of the state. At the center of the lengthiest and most widespread public debate over language policy in California, the controversy over bilingual education reflects the central conflicts underlying language policy generally.

The Politics of Bilingual Education in California

Bilingual education re-emerged nationally as a policy issue in the early 1960s. In 1968, Congress adopted the Bilingual Education Act as an amendment (Title VII) to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The 1968 Act established a small demonstration program that was expanded and strengthened in 1974, following the landmark *Lau v. Nichols* U.S. Supreme Court decision of that year. In addition to the federal policy, by 1981 twenty-six states had adopted policies requiring or authorizing bilingual education for language minority students.²

California's first bilingual education laws were adopted in 1972 and 1973, sponsored by Assemblyman Peter Chacon (D-Coronado).³ Both bills established relatively small demonstration programs supporting local school district bilingual

programs. In 1976, the state's bilingual education program was substantially strengthened and revised with the passage of A.B. 1329, again under the leadership of Assemblyman Chacon. This law, also known as the Chacon-Moscone Bilingual-Bicultural Education Act, provided the foundation for California's program for over ten years, and established the state's mandatory bilingual education program as one of the most stringent and comprehensive in the nation.⁴

In California, as elsewhere, the major impetus for enacting bilingual education policy came from growing recognition among educators and policy-makers that the traditional "submersion" of language minority children in regular classrooms had not worked, and that large numbers of them experienced educational failure. Increased pressure from Latino political activists, along with statistics demonstrating continuing growth of the non-English speaking student population, led policymakers to recognize that something had to be done.

Another major stimulus was the *Lau v. Nichols* decision of 1974, cited above. In that decision on a class action suit on behalf of San Francisco's Chinese-speaking students, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that attempting to teach students in a language they cannot understand is a violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Later that year, in addi-

tion, Congress codified the Court's language in the 1974 Equal Educational Opportunities Act, Section 1703(f).⁵ Though neither the Court nor the 1974 legislation mandated bilingual education as *the* remedy, political forces and a consensus on the part of the educators involved at that time assured that it became the teaching method of choice for language minority children, both nationally and in California.

By the time of its expiration in 1987, California's mandatory bilingual education program was serving over 600,000 limited English proficient (LEP) students, constituting some 14 percent of the state's overall elementary and secondary enrollments. Statewide, almost 75 percent of LEP students were native Spanish-speakers, with the other one-quarter representing more than 85 languages.⁶ While this data shows the significant number of California children affected by bilingual education policy, equally striking is the rapid increase in numbers of these students since the inception of the program and projections for future increases. Thus, the number of LEP students in California more than tripled between 1973 and 1987.⁷ This astonishing increase is accounted for by the largest wave of immigration to the United States since the early 20th century, and by continuing relatively high birth rates, especially among Latinos. Moreover, there is every indication that these trends will continue in the future.

Student body of the all-Chinese school in San Francisco, ca. 1890. Ethnic diversity has been a hallmark of California society and culture since early settlement of the state. The problem of educating peoples of many languages and backgrounds is as old as the Spanish missions. For decades after statehood in the nineteenth century, the caucasian majority insisted that non-white children—Indian, black, and Asian—be excluded from the normal public schools and be required to attend their own segregated institutions. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, governmental action and lawsuits by minority parents gradually declared segregated schools to be illegal. CHS Library, San Francisco



Most stunning is the continued growth of the Latino population. A survey by the U.S. Census Bureau indicated that the U.S. Latino population increased by 34.4 percent from 1980 to 1988, a growth rate nearly five times greater than that of the rest of the population. This is especially significant for California because this state has by far the largest Latino population of any state (6.6 million, compared with 4.1 million in Texas, the next largest). Almost 34 percent of the nation's 19.4 million Latinos resided in California in 1988.⁸ In view of these demographic trends, it came as no surprise, then, that State Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig announced at a press conference on September 6, 1988, that as of the 1988-89 school year, Anglos made up a minority of the state's 4.6 million public school students.⁹ Based on available population projections for California, it seems safe to assume that the educational needs of language minority students will continue to require the attention of the state's policymakers and educators well into the next century.

Despite, or more likely because of, this rapid increase in language minority students in California, the state's bilingual education policy has been the subject of intense political controversy almost since its inception. Only three years after the adoption of the far-reaching 1976 Chacon-Moscone bill, the program was subjected to a vigorous campaign to reduce its scope and requirements significantly. While the program escaped from its 1979 legislative battle relatively unscathed, it was subject to almost yearly attack thereafter.

With the controversy rising, and with the program due to "sunset" in 1987, the state legislature and governor set up a broadly representative, bipartisan state commission to seek a consensus on resolving the conflicts over this policy. The commission's 1986 report recommended that the program be continued, though with several relatively minor changes. A subsequent bill embodying the commission's recommendations, carried by Speaker Willie Brown, passed both houses of the legislature, but was vetoed by Governor Deukmejian, apparently under pressure from Republican legislators. With the sunset deadline rapidly approaching in 1987, the state commission again endorsed a similar bill sponsored by Speaker Brown, which was subsequently passed by the legislature, only to be vetoed again by the governor.

Thus, as of July 1, 1987, California no longer had a state law mandating bilingual education for its language minority students. While school districts must still adhere to State Department of Education guidelines interpreting the remaining federal and state mandates, they have considerably more

flexibility in educating language minority children and are no longer required to provide bilingual instruction *per se* to LEP students.¹⁰ A 1988 legislative effort to revive the policy was abandoned when it became clear that the governor would veto the measure a third time.¹¹ Most California school districts have continued their bilingual education programs, but the future of bilingualism in the state's schools is very uncertain.

Political Issues

Given its stormy history, it is not surprising that a complex set of political issues has surrounded the policy of bilingual education. Three issues seem most significant, and all are quite technical, at least on the surface. First, there was a protracted controversy over entrance and exit criteria for bilingual classes, with the program's supporters seeking criteria resulting in larger numbers of students in bilingual classes and opponents arguing for the opposite. The second major political issue involved credentialing criteria for teachers. Supporters of bilingual education sought strict enforcement of regulations that required qualified, i.e., certified, bilingual teachers. Opponents, citing school district claims that the supply of qualified teachers was woefully inadequate, persistently argued for a generous "waiver" program under which uncertified teachers were given six years in which to meet the requirements for full certification. Never resolved, this issue created strong pressure on policymakers to alter the pedagogical principles underlying the bilingual education program.

Closely related to these issues was an ongoing controversy over the pedagogical effectiveness of bilingual education. Beginning with a 1977 evaluation report prepared by the American Institutes of Research, bilingual education programs have been the subject of a protracted debate by educational researchers over the effectiveness of the program in providing genuine educational advancements for LEP students.¹² Not surprisingly, critics of the program cite evidence questioning its effectiveness,¹³ while supporters point to a wide array of studies demonstrating its worth.¹⁴ Even a 1987 finding by the U.S. General Accounting Office, disputing Reagan Administration claims that bilingual education programs had not been demonstrated to be successful, failed to quell the controversy.¹⁵

Native Language as the Central Issue

The debate on the three issues surveyed above has often been quite "technical" in nature. Central to each issue, however, has been the role of the LEP student's native language in



Bilingual teacher Frank Hernandez presents some lessons in both English and Spanish to second-grade students at Searles Elementary School, New Haven District. *Photograph by John McNamara*

the educational process. Nearly all bilingual education's supporters and detractors agree that a primary pedagogical goal for language minority students must be mastery of the English language. Similarly, virtually all of the program's critics have conceded that traditional "submersion" of LEP students in English-only classrooms would violate the Supreme Court's *Lau* decision and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, and that some type of special program is therefore required for them. Where the two sides disagree again and again, however, is on the place of the students' native language in the educational program.

The significance of the student's native language in policy debates becomes even clearer when placed in the broader perspective of the evolution of language policy in the schools over the past two decades. That is, at a broader, more ideological level of debate, the controversy over bilingual education in the 1960s and 1970s centered on a tension between two versions of that pedagogical method: "transitional" bilingual education and "maintenance" bilingual education. The goal of "transitional" bilingual education is a student who will prosper in a monolingual English-speaking classroom; here students are taught "bilingually" only until they have

mastered English. Whether or not the student becomes a bilingual person is not the concern of the public schools. The "maintenance" version of bilingual education, on the other hand, has the goal of creating bilingual-bicultural students. Language minority students are to master the English language in this approach as well, but classroom instruction is designed to enable them to develop and maintain their native languages and cultures as an additional goal.

The "transitional" versus "maintenance" debate of the 1970s was closely linked to a larger national debate over "cultural assimilation" versus "cultural pluralism" in American society, as will be discussed below. The point here, however, is that as the terms of this debate came to the attention of policymakers and the larger public, bilingual education legislation increasingly was specific in its support only of the "transitional" version of the program. The 1980 amendments to California's bilingual education program, for example, specified that "the primary goal of all programs under this article is, as effectively and efficiently as possible, to develop in each child fluency in English," and the Act authorized only " . . . when necessary, academic instruction through the primary language."¹⁶

This refinement, however, failed to mollify critics of the use of non-English languages in the public schools. Based upon increased public resentment toward non-English languages and doubts about the effectiveness of bilingual programs, pressure began to build in the early 1980s to abandon bilingual instruction altogether or, at the very least, to allow school districts to "experiment" with other approaches. A favorite alternative touted by bilingual education's critics was "English immersion," modeled after highly successful "French immersion" programs for anglophone children in Quebec.¹⁷ Though experts continually pointed to basic differences between the language "minority" educational challenges in Quebec as compared to the United States, critics of bilingual education were persistent in their efforts to support greater "experimentation" with this method in California and in other states. Throughout the 1980s, defenders of bilingual education have fought a "rear-guard" struggle to maintain even minimal use of non-English languages in the education of language minority students in California's public school classrooms.

Language and the Minority Struggle for Equality

In order to appreciate the central importance of the native language to advocates of bilingualism, it is necessary to understand the frame of reference from which they typically view the conflict over language policy. The contemporary movement for bilingual education began in the 1960s in a larger political context, an assertive minority group struggle for equality in American society. By the time the federal Bilingual Education Act was adopted in 1968, more than ten years of the Civil Rights Movement had passed through the television screens and before the eyes of the American public. During those years, a steadily increasing political pressure was built for sweeping away the barriers to equality caused by racial discrimination in both private and public life.

Partly as a result of these movements for equality, there emerged a new appreciation for racial and ethnic diversity in American life. By the late sixties, many of the younger leaders of the movement for equality for black people had begun to question the sufficiency and moral worthiness of "integration" into white society as the primary goal of the movement.¹⁸ The slogans "black power" and "black is beautiful" symbolized this questioning and generated strong reactions in all quarters of American society.

Among other minority groups also seeking greater equality, e.g., Latinos, American Indians, and some Asian groups, language and culture came to occupy

a more central focus of attention than was true in the black movement. Latino activists, for example, recounted numerous instances in which primary school teachers had "anglicized" their names or in which they had been punished by school authorities for speaking Spanish to their playmates on the school grounds. School officials' denial of Hispanic identity was seen as a form of cultural and linguistic discrimination that had harmful consequences for the individuals affected. The conviction grew that the language, culture, and bronze skins of *la raza* must become sources of pride and strength if Chicanos and other Latinos were ever to achieve equality. The primary assumption of this perspective was that, in the Southwest at least, the Spanish language and the Chicano people and culture were more "native" to the region than English and the Anglo Saxon-based culture of "mainstream" America.

The calls for bilingual education in the public schools by Latinos and other minority group activists, then, emerged in the 1960s within a context in which the struggle for equality by American minority groups was increasingly seen as incompatible with the goal of "assimilation" into an "Anglo-conformist" culture and as requiring support for the alternative concept of "cultural pluralism."¹⁹ The apparent assumption of the public schools that culturally different students must "disappear" via the "melting pot" into the "mainstream" of American society was viewed in this context as *prima facie* evidence of discrimination and unequal treatment. Proponents of bilingualism pointed out that the United States had never been a monolingual, monocultural nation, and they argued that efforts by state agencies, such as public schools, to unify it through "forced" assimilation into the dominant culture amounted to nothing less than "cultural genocide." Many Latinos and other minority group activists wanted to be treated as full and equal members of American society without having to give up their linguistic and cultural identities.²⁰ As one participant in the debate over bilingual education in the 1970s put it: "... my ethnic culture is a part of this American culture."²¹

One of the most articulate advocates for bilingual education from this perspective has been Eduardo Hernandez-Chavez.²² Citing the discrimination and "structural inequality" minorities have suffered in this country, for example, he argues that "... the full and equal participation of language minorities in American society requires not that these groups try to become indistinguishable from the white majority, but rather that they strengthen themselves from within—culturally, socially, politically, and economically." Further, he argues, members of language minority groups have the right to define



A parent volunteer teaches students a Mexican dance, Searles Elementary School, New Haven District. Photograph by John McNamara

their own educational interests, and this entails their freedom to maintain distinctive linguistic and cultural ties. If this right were fully realized, "the goals of education would surely change from an emphasis on mainstreaming and assimilation to cultural pluralism and ethnolinguistic solidarity." It is important to emphasize here that Hernandez-Chavez, like virtually all other U.S. advocates of bilingualism in public school classrooms, does not argue that language minority students should not learn English. Rather, he insists that we should aim toward *bilingual* and *bicultural* students who would feel at home *both* in their ethnic communities and in the dominant Anglo-based language and culture.²³

In summary, then, preserving the native language is central to the aims of many proponents of bilingual education because it symbolizes for them the very essence of the drive for equality for linguistic and cultural minority groups in the United States. Denial by public institutions of the languages and cultures of these groups, several of which have older claims on this region than the majority culture, represents a public denial of their right to equal membership in the American polity. Aiming for a pluralistic conception of equality,

they view the right to retain and develop one's native language and culture as a fundamental civil and political right.²⁴

The Response of Critics

Some opponents of bilingual education, especially its "maintenance" version, have responded to these proposals by arguing that linguistic and cultural pluralism is incompatible with equality. In a 1976 editorial on bilingual education, for example, the *New York Times* warned against "a misguided linguistic separatism that, while it may seem to promise its advocates limited political and ideological power, can only have the effect of condemning to permanent economic and social disadvantage those who cut themselves off from the majority culture."²⁵ In this vein, many supporters of the "English immersion" alternative to bilingual education have argued that classroom time spent on languages other than English can only hinder the English language educational development of language minority students.

This common-sense argument is based on at least two important assumptions. *First*, ignoring the emphasis placed by bilingual education's supporters

on bilingualism and biculturalism, it assumes that educational development in native language *takes away from*, rather than adds to, the student's educational development in a second language (English in this case). That is, the argument begins from the assumption that bilingualism and biculturalism are not really possible, and that the development of one language necessarily creates a deficiency in the other. This being the case, the *second* assumption of the critics is that development of a language other than English by the public schools is really aimed at linguistic and cultural "separatism" on behalf of minority communities. Proponents of bilingual education, accordingly, are accused of seeking to push our society toward the linguistic "divisiveness" of countries such as Canada, Belgium, and Spain. Based upon these two crucial assumptions, the debate is shifted onto an entirely different footing by the most vociferous opponents of bilingual education, away from an issue of equality and toward an issue of social unity.

Ethnicity, Language and the Fragility of Social Unity

While the spark that ignites the emotions of bilingualism's supporters is discrimination against minorities and its resultant inequality, the emotionally intense feelings against language diversity seem to be set off most surely by the fear of disharmony and social conflict. Thus, the same New York Times editorial cited above warned that "the disconcerting strength gathered by separatism in Canada contains a lesson for the United States and its approach to bilingual education." And that lesson, the *Times* concluded, was

that trying to make "Spanish-speaking enclaves" permanent "points the road to cultural, economic and political divisiveness."²⁶ A similar point, more hysterical in tone, was made by Tom Bethell in a 1979 *Harper's* article: "Bilingual education is an idea that appeals . . . to those who never did think that another idea, the United States of America, was a particularly good one to begin with, and that the sooner it is restored to its component 'ethnic' parts the better off we shall all be."²⁷

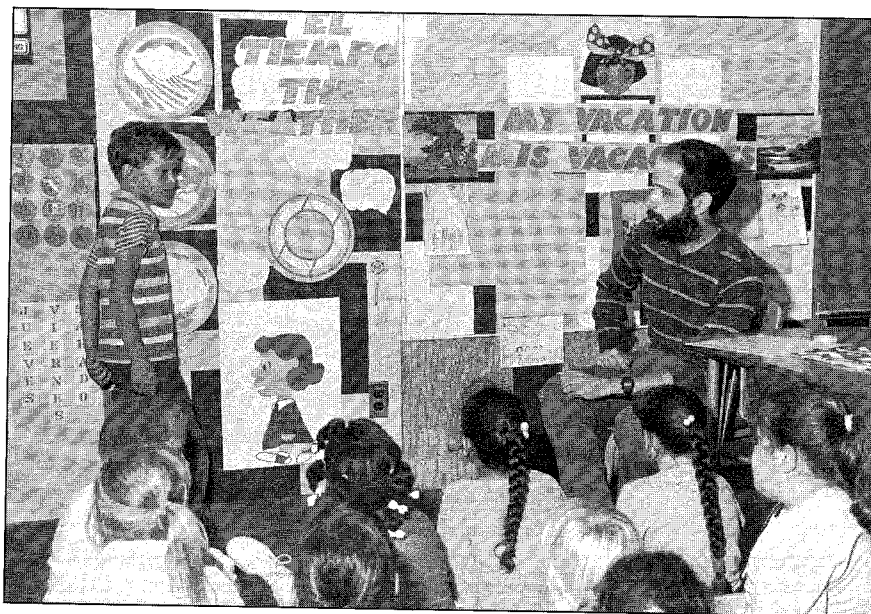
This theme of the incompatibility of publicly supported bilingualism with national unity has been the central argument of the "Official English" movement as well. The 1986 state ballot argument in favor of California's Proposition 63, making English the "official" language of the state, for example, read in part:

The State of California stands at a crossroads. It can move toward fears and tensions of language rivalries and ethnic distrust. Or it can reverse that trend and strengthen our common bond, the English language. . . .

Our American heritage is now threatened by language conflicts and ethnic separatism. Today, there is a serious erosion of English as our common bond. This amendment reaffirms California's oneness as a state, and as one of fifty states united by a common tongue. . . .²⁸

Assemblyman Frank Hill (R-Whittier), one of the leading sponsors of Proposition 63, pointedly vowed to make the elimination of bilingual education a prime goal for implementation of the amendment following its passage.²⁹ And less than one year after Proposition 63 was passed by California voters, of course, the Chacon-Moscone law was allowed to "sunset."

Bilingual teacher Frank Hernandez and class, Searles Elementary School, New Haven School District. Photograph by John McNamara



Is there a way to work through these emotionally-charged and deeply divided views toward a consensus among the most engaged participants in the debate over language policy? While it is certainly not possible to allay all fears or to assuage all hurts, we may at least focus clearly on the questions that remain to be resolved. A good place to begin is to recall the points of agreement between the two sides in the debate over bilingual education. As noted above, both proponents and opponents of bilingual education agree that legally, if not morally, special educational efforts are required on behalf of language minority students in order to meet the requirements of the *Lau* decision and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act. Second, both proponents and opponents agree that mastery of the English language must be a primary goal of education for language minority children. The large question still unresolved is the appropriate role of the student's native language in the educational process and, more generally, in public life.

Is there a resolution to this question? With respect to language minority education, there is increasing evidence pointing toward a common solution for all sides. That is, all persons in the state of California have a common interest in the educational success of language minority students. California's economy has remained vibrant and healthy in no small part because of its increasing technical innovation and sophistication, and because the state has remained committed to the public support of an educated workforce capable of continuing that economic growth.³⁰ Given this need for an educated workforce, and given the historical patterns of disproportionate educational failure of minority students in the public schools, all sides in the debate over language policy must surely agree that the changing demographic composition of the state represents a severe challenge to the public schools for the foreseeable future.

A further economic reason for common concern over the educational success of language minority students lies in another demographic phenomenon, the relatively high immigration and birth rates among Latinos and the dramatically extended life expectancies of the entire population. This demographic trend means that within a short period of time a disproportionately Latino, "young" population will be asked to support a disproportionately Anglo, "aging" population throughout the country, especially in California.³¹ Thus, the economic success of today's Latino students will translate directly into tomorrow's economic security for our entire population. If for no other reason, all Cali-

fornians share a common economic interest in the educational success of language minority students.

With that thought in mind, let us return to the crucial assumption made by opponents of bilingual education: that bilingualism and biculturalism are really not possible and that, therefore, education in the student's native language detracts from, rather than adds to, mastery of English as a second language. Kenji Hakuta has recently traced the intellectual history of the belief that bilingualism is not compatible with high levels of intellectual accomplishment, and has marshalled the basic research which seems clearly to establish the fallacy of that belief.³² Indeed, Hakuta cites elaborate evidence indicating that, in some respects, bilingual individuals exhibit *higher* levels of intellectual competence than do monolingual persons. In other words, the research indicates that it is those who speak *only* English or *only* Spanish, for example, who are intellectually "behind" their potential, not those who speak both languages.

Of equal significance to the debate, recent research reported by linguist James Cummins suggests that *building upon*, rather than supplanting, the native language of LEP students may be the *only* way to increase the effectiveness of educational programs designed for them.³³ In what he terms the "interdependence principle" Cummins writes that if students have not reached a certain "threshold" of competence in their first language (L1), efforts to teach them in a second language (L2) will be less successful than if they had reached that threshold.³⁴ This is especially true, Cummins has shown, for members of "caste-like" subordinate groups in the society, whose languages and cultures are generally "devalued" by dominant groups.³⁵ Thus, maintenance and further development of native language skills may be necessary to enable language minority students to have an equal opportunity for academic success generally in the public schools, quite apart from the emotionally loaded question of assimilation versus cultural pluralism. Indirectly supporting this analysis, there is a large body of social and behavioral science research literature which identifies self-esteem as a crucial factor for both emotional and physical well-being, and shows it to be a critical variable in academic success. Bilingual education, then, need not be seen primarily as a self-serving program for minority teachers and ideologues. Rather, it may well be necessary for the future well-being of all segments of the state's population.

Despite this apparently "neat" solution to the underlying value conflicts between proponents and opponents of bilingual education, however, there is little likelihood that these protagonists will soon agree to public financing of "maintenance" bilingual



In California schools, minority children are introduced to American folk culture. New Haven District first and second graders performed the "Virginia Reel," at the "Marching On" musical program, ca. 1987. Photograph by John McNamara

education programs as mandated by the state of California. A major stumbling block here is that this solution does little to mollify apparently widespread public fears among the dwindling Anglo majority that "foreign" languages and cultures have "invaded" the state on a massive scale, and that this "invasion" portends "separatism," "divisiveness," and social disintegration. Expressions of these fears in newspapers, by elected officials, and in voter-backed initiatives, can only continue to feed minority group fears of Anglo hostility, racism, and discrimination, thereby stimulating the very divisiveness feared by its perpetrators.

The melding of ethnic and linguistic diversity into a cohesive society of equals is never going to be an easy task. To my knowledge, no other society on earth has ever attempted such an enterprise on this scale. Given the high immigration rate into California, it is clear that we must launch a major effort to integrate these newcomers into our society, economy, and polity. The linguistically and culturally diverse newcomers to California, including both school children and their parents, must be encouraged to become "Americans," and the public schools have a major role to play in this activity.

In saying this, however, my ultimate point is that we should not mistake *uniformity* for *unity* in defining the meaning of the evolving "American" identity. This is an old mistake and deceptively convenient under conditions of change. While every political community needs common values and practices to bring it together and focus the attention of its members on their shared interests and

destiny, this need for unity should not be interpreted to mean an absence of diversity or conflict. To the contrary, the absence of diversity and conflict signifies the absence of a genuinely *political* community, as the record of totalitarian states makes clear.

Based on the historical record and the political demands of *American* racial and cultural groups, there is little reason to fear the growth of "separatist" political movements among them. Indeed, if those in the majority culture could gain the security to see our state's linguistic and cultural diversity as a valuable resource, there are grounds for believing that policies designed to preserve that diversity would strengthen the unity and legitimacy of our political community. By including linguistic and cultural minority communities in our definition of the political community, and by including the members of those communities in the political processes by which public policies are made, we strengthen the bonds by which we are held together as a nation.

CHS

See notes beginning on page 262.

Ron Schmidt received his Ph.D. from the University of California, Riverside, in political science. Since 1972 he has been on the faculty of the Department of Political Science at California State University, Long Beach, and has been department chair for eight years. He is a specialist on public policy, political theory and state government (especially California politics), and public policies affecting racial and ethnic minority communities. He is currently at work on a book on language policy in the United States.

IV. Policy

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE AMERICAN DREAM?

Changing Earning Opportunities and Prospects of Middle-Class Californians, 1967-1987

by Nancey Green Leigh

Introduction

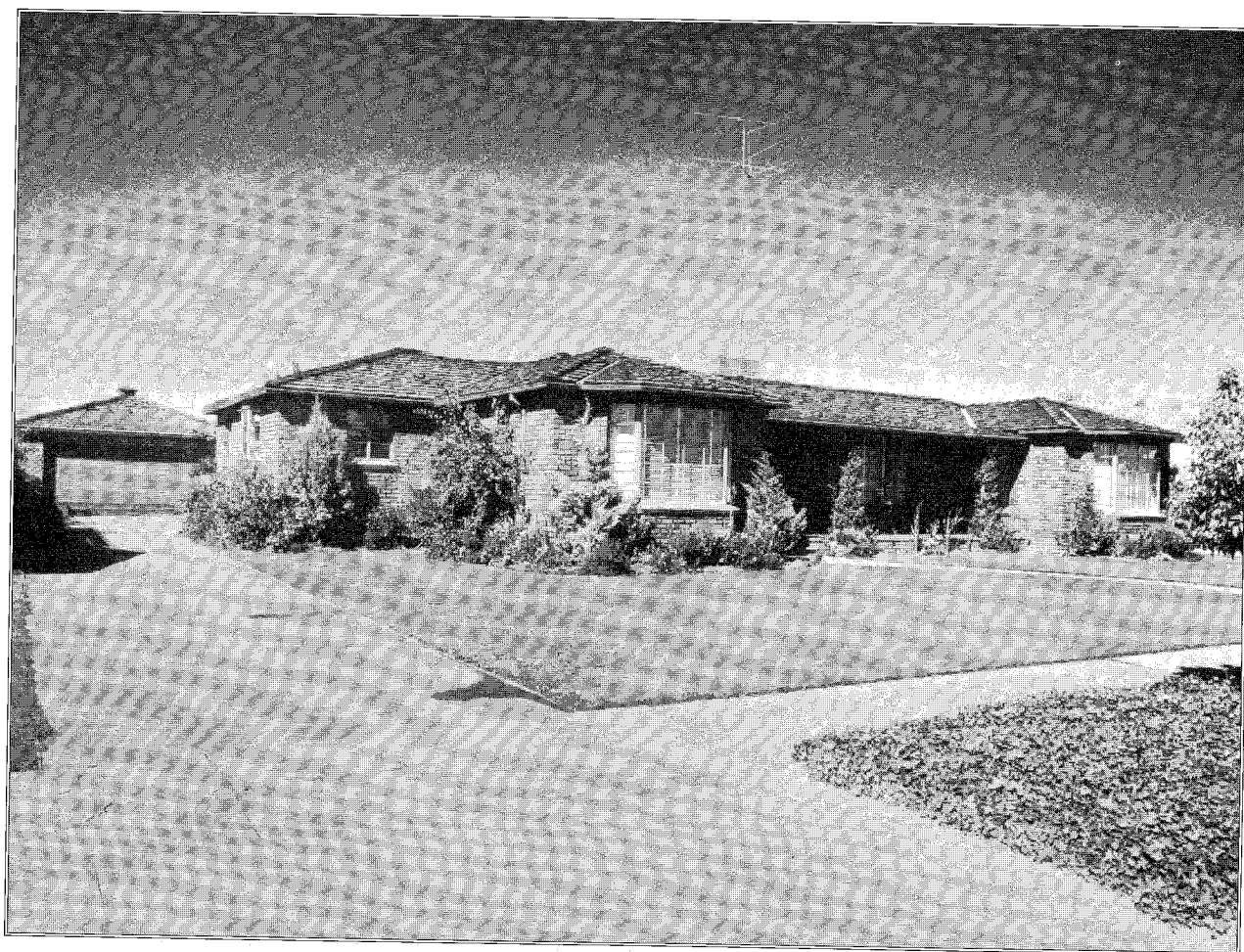
The search for the middle-class American dream has attracted a continuous stream of immigrants to California, a stream that shows no signs of abating. The exact character of that dream is nowhere precisely defined, though the image of its modern variant was presented with great effect by Hollywood television shows from the 1950s and 1960s such as "Ozzie and Harriet." Any adequate definition of the middle-class ideal would have to be a continually revised definition that reflects the development of new ways of life, new goods and services, as well as relative changes in the prices of goods and services consumed within a middle standard of living. At the present time, we could say roughly in quantitative terms, that this standard includes "such material goods as a single-family home, one or two cars (including a new one), a washing machine and dryer, a dishwasher, a color TV, raising and educating children, [and the provision for] a lengthy period of retirement."¹

Today, in California and across the nation, there is increasing concern that the middle-class dream is less and less attainable for working people. In fact, some of the greatest recent policy concerns have arisen over what is seen as the growing inability of the "Ozzie and Harriet" household (a mar-

ried couple with children and one breadwinner) to attain a middle-class standard of living. Historically, the assumption that the earnings of one full-time worker, through his or her earnings and labor achievement, could purchase a middle standard of living for the worker's household has been an assumed feature of the middle-class dream. By focusing in this paper on the changing experience of the California full-time worker between 1967 and 1987, we shall demonstrate how this assumption has become increasingly unrealistic and the promise of the middle-class living less attainable for a growing number of California's hard-working dreamers.

Because of the state's relative standing in the nation, changes in California's economy and earnings distribution provide essential input to the national debate about the disappearing middle-income group. California is the nation's largest state, accounting for more than 11 percent of the entire population in 1987. During the 1980s, population grew twice as fast as the national average. The percent of this growth that is due to net immigration is four times higher than the average across the nation.² The state's population is, arguably, the most diverse in the country. In California, aggregate ethnic minorities will soon constitute the majority.

California's economy is also the most productive in the country and, in fact, contributes even a larger share to the gross national product (nearly



Since the nineteenth century, the ideal of American middle-class life has included a single-family home, such as this one in San Jose in the 1960s. In the last two decades, that ideal has become threatened from many sides. *CHS Library, San Francisco*

13 percent) than it does to the nation's population.³ Indeed, California has been called a *nation-state* and one of the largest industrial economies in the world. This economy has always been on the leading edge of post-war industrialism. "High technology" originated in California's Silicon Valley. Not unrelated, the defense industry has always had a strong presence in the state, a presence that firmly established itself with the ship and aircraft industries of World War II.

From its combination of population and economic growth and new cultural styles, California

has projected to the rest of the nation and the world

potent images of high technology and innovation in products, work, and lifestyle that have captured the imaginations of policy makers and ordinary people alike. . . . The image of the good life holds enormous power to attract migrants from both rich and poor countries, as well as from other regions of the U.S. . . .⁴

In their study of the state's economic transformation, Michael Teitz and Philip Shapira go on to observe that while "California seems teflon-like in

its ability to ride out even such storms as the twin recessions of 1979-1982 . . . [its] aggregate growth conceals great turbulence."⁵ The familiar glossy picture of California prosperity hides the effects of massive recent deindustrialization, with high levels of plant closures and worker layoffs. This picture also hides the fact that California's economy has become increasingly vulnerable to national and international economic uncertainties and to political turmoil.

How have "growth and turbulence" in California's population and economic structure affected the labor force, its earning opportunities, and its ability to attain a middle standard of living? To answer these questions, it is useful to look at data from the Current Population Survey.⁶ Specifically, we shall look at the distribution of earnings within California during the last two decades and at changing earnings patterns for full-time and part-time workers. We will also focus on changes in the levels of educational attainment and in the broad industry groups that employ California's workers. We will conclude by relating changes in earnings to changes in fringe benefits and the cost of homeownership.

The principal findings of this study can be summarized as follows. During the last two decades, two significant trends have emerged for Califor-

nia's workers in their quest for the middle-class dream. Consideration only of earnings patterns reveals first, that California's full-time workers have done well over the last twenty years, and that the major costs of economic growth and turbulence have fallen on part-time workers. However, when we also consider two important consumption items associated with the middle-class standard of living—fringe benefits and homeownership—we discover a second trend in which full-time workers in the state are also facing great difficulty.

Change in the Earnings Patterns of California's Labor Force, 1967 and 1987

Over the last twenty years, more than 5.6 million workers have been added to the California economy. The state's workers have consistently earned more than those in the nation as a whole.⁷ When the state's full-time workers are divided into low-, middle-, and upper-earner groups, we find for the late 1960s, that the percentage who were low and middle earners was less than that nationwide, but that the percentage who were upper earners (37 percent) was 12 percent greater than the national figure. At that time, more so than in the rest of the nation, California's workers were concentrated in higher-paying jobs.

The prosperity of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s resulted in phenomenal expansion of residential districts. As suburban sprawl continued, it collided with earlier agricultural developments. Sprouting along the paths of extending freeways, tracts of detached, spacious, middle-class homes encroached on farmland in Orange County and the San Gabriel and San Fernando Valleys in southern California and, as shown here in 1959, in the new Alameda County city of Fremont. *Courtesy California Department of Transportation*



Over the next two decades, California's distribution of low, middle, and upper earners changed very little, while the national distribution came to look much more like California's had been in the 1960s. As a result, although California's full-time workers are still in a superior earning position compared to the rest of the country, their relative advantage is slipping as their earnings distribution has not experienced the national upward shift.

The major issue here is not, however, that the national earnings distribution has come to look more like California's. It is, rather, that there has been a divergence between California and much of the nation in the ability of workers to purchase the middle standard of living. In this trend, which we will discuss shortly, the rest of the nation has attained a superior position to California's. In addition, part-time workers in California present a different and bleaker earnings pattern from that sketched above. The majority of part-time workers have always been low earners. Part-time workers today are, however, becoming polarized: over the last two decades, they have shifted from the middle group, their historic position, into the low- and upper-earner groups.

In general, it appears that the part-time workers' position in the state's labor market is eroding. The expansion of the low-earner segment of the working force is one indicator of this erosion. The other indicator is found in a comparison of median earnings of part-time workers. Again using the nation as a reference point, little change occurred over the last decade in the ratio of median earnings for California's part-time workers to the entire nation (the figure was 38 percent in 1977, and 37 percent in 1987). Significant changes did occur, however, among different demographic groups within the part-time labor force. Specifically, and depending on the part-time workers' ethnicity, California males' earnings dropped 8-9 percent, while females' earnings increased 1-4 percent.

In contrast, the median earnings figure for California's full-time workers was 45 percent higher than that for the nation in 1977. By 1987, that figure had increased to 64 percent. Full-time white males' median earnings, which were 75 percent higher than those of the national median, grew to over one hundred percent higher during that period. California's full-time women workers have done well, although they still lag considerably behind males. In 1977, their median earnings figure was basically the same as that for the nation. Ten years later, the median earnings for full-time women in California had risen to 30 percent higher than those of the nation's.

The Relationship between Changing Earnings Distributions and Changing Levels of Educational Attainment

Among California's workers, we find that full-time earners in the state have high levels of postsecondary education relative to other large states such as New York, Illinois, and Texas. A much larger proportion of California earners have some college education, though not necessarily a bachelor's degree. In the last two decades, however, the earning potential of uneducated workers eroded significantly. Between 1967 and 1987, the earnings distribution for California's full-time workers who did not have high school degrees dramatically shifted downwards. Twenty-three percent of this group were upper earners in 1967, compared to only 9 percent in 1987. In contrast, the percentage of uneducated workers who are low earners has increased from 7 percent to almost 14 percent. The earnings distribution of full-time earners with bachelor degrees has also shifted downwards substantially. Sixty-five percent of college graduates were upper earners in 1967, compared to 55 percent in 1987. California's full-time earners with postgraduate training have the highest levels of earnings; nearly three-quarters are in the upper earner group.

For California's full-time and part-time earners alike, the shifts in levels of educational attainment have been paralleled over the last decade by shifts in earnings distributions. For example, full-time workers employed in the broad social infrastructure sector (health, education, social services, and government) have seen upward shifts in both earnings distribution and levels of educational attainment. The same trend has occurred for transportation and trade workers. In contrast, workers in natural resources, construction, and traditional manufacturing have experienced downwards trends in earnings distributions and education levels. Among part-time workers, a decline in the level of educational attainment of workers in the largest employing sector, transportation and trade, has accompanied a downward shift in its earnings distribution. Part-time workers in the social infrastructure sector, on the other hand, show the opposite trend. Their already high levels of educational attainment have increased further; and a growing percentage of their ranks are upper earners.

The trends of the last decade in California appear to bolster a prediction made for the nation that: "Inequality in education may well become the most significant source of wage inequality."⁸ In general, full-time workers' levels of educational attainment have increased significantly and so have their

earnings. Part-time workers' overall levels of educational attainment have improved somewhat, but not in all sectors. Further, the percentage of part-time workers without high school degrees is twice as high as that for full-time workers, and the part-time earnings distribution has actually shifted downwards.

In the future, levels of education attainment will have an even greater role in determining individual economic status. Projections indicate that the share of total employment held by occupations requiring the highest education levels will increase through the end of this century, while the share for occupations requiring the least amount of education will decline. The three major occupational groups whose workers have the highest educational attainment (including executive, administrative and managerial workers, professional workers, and technical and related support workers) are expected to continue to grow faster than average. In contrast, occupations requiring low levels of education, such as administrative support workers, farming, forestry and fishery workers, laborers, and manufacturing operators and fabricators, are expected to grow slowly or actually decline in numbers. This downward projection stems from such continuing trends as office and factory automation, as well as from increasing preference among American consumers for imported, rather than domestic, products.⁹

In general, blacks and Hispanics account for a greater proportion of persons employed in those occupations with unfavorable growth rates. These are the same occupations with the lowest education requirements. At the same time, blacks and Hispanics are under-represented in the occupations projected to grow the fastest and which require the greatest amount of education. The implication for California policy-makers is that attention must be given to helping its economically disadvantaged minorities increase their levels of educational attainment so that they can pursue the most favorable job opportunities. If their levels of educational attainment are not raised, the primary source of employment for disadvantaged minorities will be increasingly in the service worker group.

California Workers' Ability to Attain a Middle Standard of Living

On the surface, the earnings data for California's full-time workers indicate that they have a high or upward-skewed distribution of earnings. But when we look beyond earn-

ings, first to how workers' pensions and health care are provided for, and second to the ability of earnings to purchase housing, it quickly becomes evident that California's full-time workers have fallen into a much inferior position relative to the rest of the nation.

First, California's workers, both full-time and part-time, have experienced across the board declines in the pensions and health benefits during the 1980s.¹⁰ The biggest declines have occurred in the percentage of full-time workers who are included in employer group health plans. These declines have occurred in all three earnings groups. However, lower earners—those who can least afford to pay for health coverage themselves—have experienced the greatest drops.¹¹

Second, even though benefit levels are dropping generally in California, it might appear that, since 37 percent of the state's full-time workers are upper earners compared to 30 percent nationwide, these workers would have relatively less difficulty purchasing a house than people elsewhere in the nation. To the contrary, the housing affordability index for the state in May of 1989 was close to one third that of the nation overall, declining from a figure of one-half that of the nation's only six months earlier. In December of 1988, 23 percent of California households had the annual income needed to purchase the median-priced single-family home in the state, compared to 47 percent nationwide.¹² By May of 1989, only 15 percent of California households had the annual income needed to purchase the median home, compared to 44 percent nationwide.¹³ The sales price of this median-priced California home was nearly \$202,000, compared to \$93,000 nationwide. In the largest urban centers of the state, the inability of full-time workers to purchase homes has become an even more extreme problem. For example, the housing affordability index for the San Francisco metropolitan area was 9 percent, with the median-priced home close to \$268,000. As a result, the minimum household income needed to qualify for the May 1989 median-priced home exceeded \$90,000 in the San Francisco area, and \$68,000 in the state of California as a whole.¹⁴

Conclusion and Implications for California's Policy Makers

Ironically, California's sustained high levels of population and economic growth appear to have made the middle-class dream increasingly less attainable. Spiraling housing costs around the state



Apartments, San Francisco, 1980. Declining affordability is not the only pressure on middle-class housing ideals. Congestion and rising land values have squeezed building space. Townhouses, condominiums, and apartments have become much more common for many middle-class families, replacing the sprawling homes on large lots. *Photograph by Stephen Johnson*

reflect a housing supply insufficient to meet the demands of the growing population. The Bay Area Economic Forum, made up of a cross section of government, business, labor, and higher education leaders in the San Francisco region, has noted:

The skyrocketing cost of housing—especially housing close to employment centers—has driven up wages, and made it more difficult to recruit and transfer employees in all but the high compensation brackets.¹⁵

Regional government officials and policy-makers, as well as the business leaders, are worried that the state's high housing costs could well trigger an economic decline, as workers will be either unable or unwilling to live in high cost areas, and employers will have to relocate to find labor.

Workers suffer further burdens because the high wages they must demand, in a relatively futile effort as individual earners to keep up with hous-

ing costs, forces employers to look for other ways to reduce labor costs, such as reducing fringe benefits. It is true, of course, that the increasing number of households with more than one earner has allowed homeownership levels to remain high in California. This should still be viewed, however, as an indicator of deteriorating quality of life and decreasing ability to attain the middle standard of living. Households whose homeownership is based on the earnings of more than one worker face lower financial security, in that mortgage payments require more than one earner's income. Thus, the earnings of one household member can not be substituted for another's in the event that one member becomes unemployed. In the case of families with children, the dual-earner households also face greater childrearing expenses.

The trends over the last two decades lead us to conclude that Californians' prospects for attaining

and retaining a middle standard of living are diminishing. Furthermore, if California's role as the forerunner and, indeed, setter of national trends continues, national prospects for attaining and retaining the middle-class standard of living are less than encouraging.

What kinds of policy and planning intervention within California might improve the people's prospects for attaining, or even retaining, a middle-class living standard? To begin with, in terms of homeownership, the solution lies less in changes in the labor market than in changes in the housing market. We have seen that the earnings distribution for California's full-time earners has continued to shift upwards. At the same time, however, the purchasing power of their earnings has dramatically fallen. Why have increases in the costs of homeownership in the state far outpaced increases in earnings levels? To gain a more complete understanding of what can be done to prevent further erosion of the state's standard of living, we need to be able to provide clear-cut answers to this question and to implement policies that will contain skyrocketing housing costs.

The division of responsibilities at federal, state, and local levels of government in this country suggests that it is at the local level that ameliorative policies would have to be implemented. Therefore, research and greater local recognition in California of issues such as influences of the state's changing demographic structure on housing demand, and of the growing discrepancies between the cost of new housing and wages of new jobs created in specific localities (the jobs/housing imbalance), is needed. With regard to changing demographics, we need to determine to what extent dual-earner households are a response to rising house prices, and to what extent rising house prices are a function of dual-earners' income raising the level at which the housing market tops out. Further, how much has the demand for housing by the baby boomers driven up housing prices? In addition, what proportion of rising housing prices can be attributed to exclusionary zoning and planning practices of California communities trying to protect their quality of life and financial investments? Finally, how far have these practices gone to price out smaller, lower-income, and/or nontraditional households?

The response of adding more earners to a household to maintain standard of living can only go so far. Further real rises in the state's housing prices will eventually price out even dual-earner households. Those dual-earner households who are raising children face tremendous additional burdens.

Recognition of these problems and the strengthening of public/private partnerships to ease the burdens of the state's working parents, the group that is also producing California's future labor force, will improve prospects for present and long-run economic development and quality of life.

Inequality in education appears increasingly to be the source of earnings inequality. Historically, education has been funded at the local level. However, as the case of California illustrates all too clearly, property tax revolts, as embodied in the passage of Proposition Thirteen, can severely affect school systems. Ultimately, these revolts are economically self-destructive. Wealthy communities within the state have been quite successful raising private funds or passing special bond issues to supplement their inadequate public school budgets, while the mass of California's children in the poor districts are being inadequately prepared for the labor force. Unless corrective efforts are made, a very large proportion of today's school-age population may be relegated to permanent, marginal economical status, becoming drags on California's future prosperity.

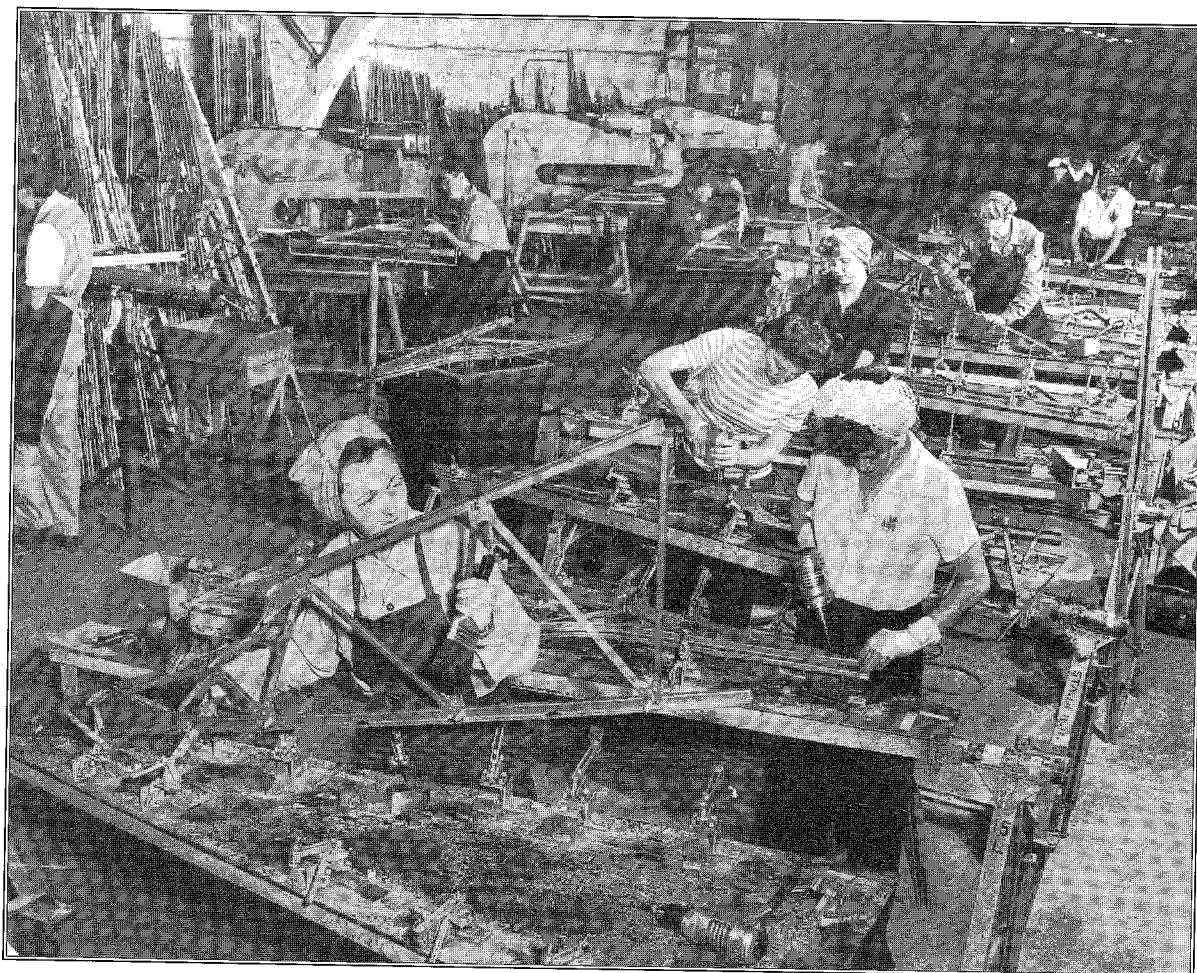
The preceding discussion on needed areas of policy attention for protecting the state's standard of living does not deal with the distribution of earnings per se. However, policy concern is warranted for the directly-related area of fringe-benefit compensation. The reductions in California workers' levels of "unearned" compensation, in the forms of health insurance and pension benefits, do not bode well for the security of the standard of living they have achieved. Taking away these paid benefits is tantamount to reducing salaries. In the case of health insurance, extreme increases in premiums over the last few years are difficult for any one worker (and, granted, many employers) to plan for. Employers feel a profit squeeze, workers an income squeeze; and workers unable to keep up with rising out of pocket premiums are placed in precarious positions in the event of catastrophic illnesses. Perhaps the solution to this particular threat to a middle standard of living can be found only at the national level, through extending the public sector's role in ensuring that all members of society are adequately covered. As the nation's most populated state, however, California should certainly be expected to play an important role in working out this solution.

The promise of attaining the middle-class life has historically been a strong factor drawing working people to California. That this standard of living is increasingly less attainable for growing numbers of California's hardworking dreamers is a phenomena

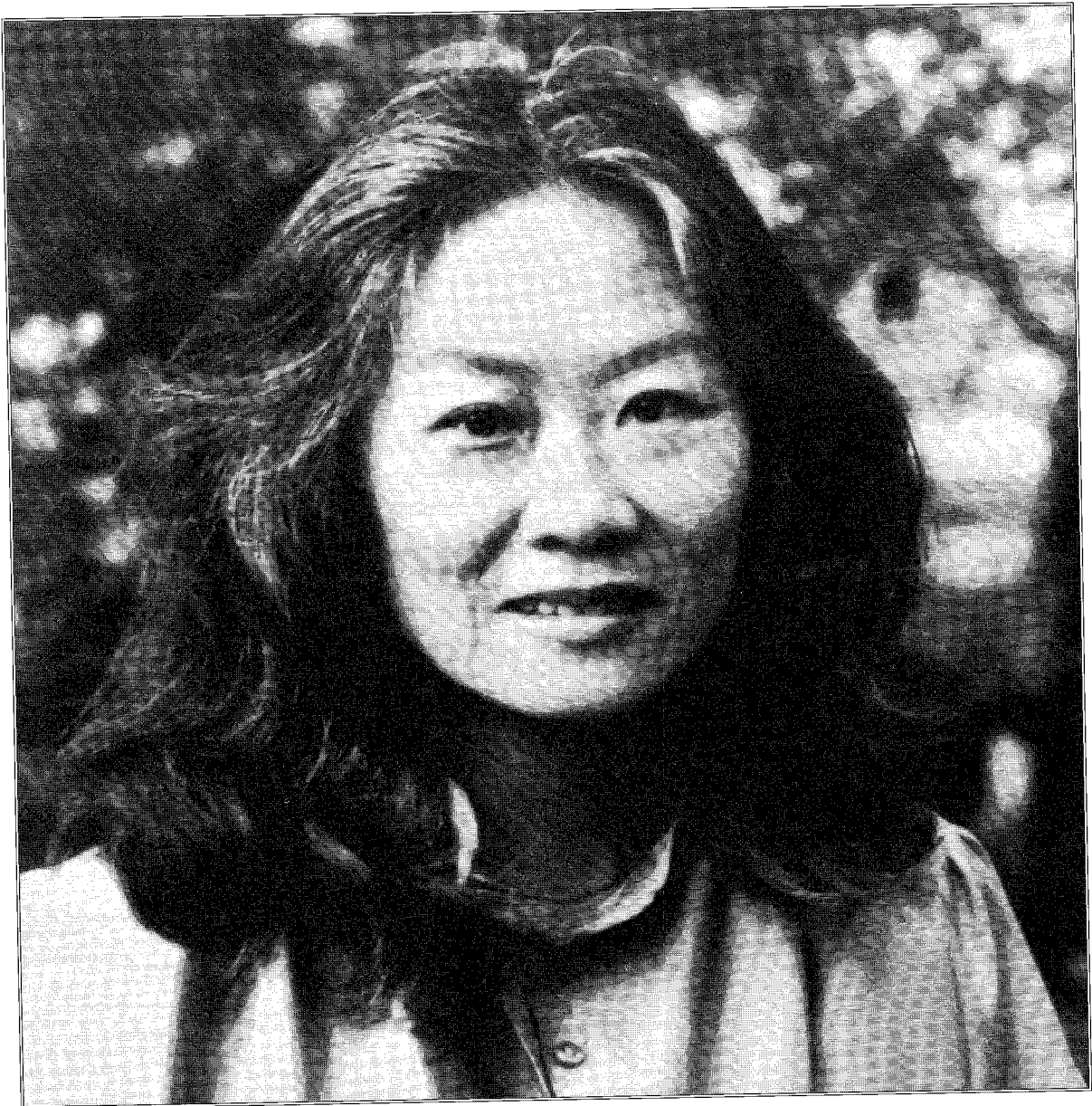
that deserves leaders' careful attention and response. It has profound implications for the state's future social and economic development. CHS

See notes beginning on page 263.

Nancey Green Leigh completed a dissertation entitled "National and Regional Change in the Earnings Distribution: What is Happening to the Middle?" while earning her doctorate at the University of California, Berkeley. She is an assistant professor in the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. This paper is based on work supported by the National Science Foundation under award SES-8708096. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.



These World War II southern California women worked in aircraft plants in part because men were in the army. Four decades later, the granddaughters of this generation work along with their husbands merely to retain a middle-class income for their families. *Los Angeles Public Library*



Maxine Hong Kingston. *Photo courtesy Earl Kingston*

Mah-Jongg:

A radio play based on the novel *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book**

by Maxine Hong Kingston
Radio adaptation by Earll Kingston

Introduction by Earll Kingston

Mah-Jongg, is an adaptation for radio based on chapter five, "The Song of Ruby Long Legs and Zeppelin," from *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* by Maxine Hong Kingston. Mah-Jongg, was performed in workshop at Eureka Theatre in November 1988 and at the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento in February 1989 as part of the first "Envisioning California" conference. This is its first publication.

I undertook the adaptation as a member of California on Stage, a group of writers and historians who, through a process of research, readings, and workshops, are dedicated to bringing alive in new works for stage and radio the richness of California history.

Set in the 1960s, this play provides glimpses of Chinese American life, specifically the intergenerational affection and tension between older people who grew up in Chinatowns and their more assimilated children; the characteristic blend of Chinese and English used by the older generation; and the world of Asian American show business that evolved in Chinatowns.

My special thanks go to Ken Grantham and Donna Breed for their assistance and inspiration.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

WITTMAN AH SING	early 20s; American accent
TANYA DE WEESE	early 20s; American accent
RUBY AH SING, Wittman's mother	Chinese immigrant accent
The Aunties:	
BESSIE	soft voice, older-sounding
MAYDENE	very cold voice
MABEL	raucous, sexy
LILAH	low, seductive voice
DOLLY	sweet and caring

NIGHT-CLUB MC, doubles as NEWSCASTER

* © 1988, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

[Hum of car on highway; car interior. Up to establish and hold under dialogue.]

[Sound of car radio: newscast]

NEWSCASTER *[on car radio]*: President Johnson has authorized the deployment of an additional 50,000 troops in response to—

[Radio switches off.]

TANYA: Wittman? Wittman?

WITTMAN: Hmmm?

TANYA: Were you asleep?

WITTMAN: No, just thinking . . . about you.

TANYA: Oh. *[Pause]* Well?

[Spacey music interior theme. Up to establish and hold under monologue.]

WITTMAN: *[Interior]* Lover, love, I love you, love at first sight. Go ahead. Say it. Right out loud. No “uhs” or “you knows” or coughs or conditionals. Just, “Tanya, I love you.”

[Interior music out.]

TANYA: Well? What are you thinking?

WITTMAN: Are we legal?

TANYA: *[Puzzled]* What?

WITTMAN: Did you know Gabe was going to up there at Coit Tower at nine o'clock in the morning?

TANYA: No, I didn't. Honestly.

WITTMAN: Are you sure it's legal? He's a real minister? We're really married?

TANYA: Definitely. He's with the Universal Life Church. Haven't you ever seen their ad in the *Berkeley Barb*?

WITTMAN: I guess so.

TANYA: He's perfectly legal and so are we. *[Remembering]* “I plight thee my troth.”

WITTMAN: Those tourists thought it was a movie. They kept looking around for the camera.

TANYA: Did you see that big guy in the “Cornhuskers” t-shirt? He had tears in his eyes.

WITTMAN: You mean when you were plighting? Just then I was looking at the tears in your eyes.

TANYA: Tears of relief, Wittman. The deferment for married guys is going to stop any day now. I saved you from the draft, lover . . . *[beat]* . . . I love you, Wittman.

WITTMAN: *[beat]* Take “Downtown Sacramento,” here.

TANYA: Look. We're almost there. I'm getting a little nervous. In just a few minutes I'm going to meet your parents. Aren't you going to tell me anything about them? For example, they speak English, don't they?

WITTMAN: Yes, and Chinese too. Now my father, Zeppelin . . .

TANYA: Who?

WITTMAN: Zeppelin.

TANYA: *[Laughing]* Like in dirigible?

WITTMAN: Don't laugh. It's a perfectly respectable Chinese given name: Bradford, Stanford, Worldster, Zeppelin. Trochaic, heroic, presidential, solid. Zep, though, was never too solid. He never stuck with anything for long. A war vet, a gambler, gold prospector, cook. He publishes his own newsletter. Used to work backstage at my mother's shows. Now, he does a lot of fishing. Watches “American Bandstand” with the sound off.

TANYA: What's that—your mother's shows?

WITTMAN: Yeah. Ruby, my mother, used to be a showgirl. She was in the line behind Toyette Mar at Forbidden City in Chinatown. That's where she met my father. He was working his way up from Stage Door Johnny to Back Stage Electrician. One look at Mom and he was wired. Don't worry, she'll have the scrapbook in your face before we're in the door. Turn left at the next light.

[Car slows, turns, accelerates. Hold under.]

WITTMAN: *[Starts coughing.]*

TANYA: Are you all right? *[She pats him on back.]*

WITTMAN: I'm OK. I always cough when I get near home.

TANYA: It gets me in the stomach. Half a bottle of Kaopectate and I'm ready to see my mother. *[Pause.]* I'm starting to feel that way now.

WITTMAN: You'll be fine. Turn left here.

[Engine slows.]

WITTMAN: *[Coughs.]* Pull in behind that green VW.

[Engine slows to idle, turns off.]

[Bird song. Children playing; up to establish, then hold under dialogue (car windows are open).]

TANYA: Wittman, I feel a little . . .

WITTMAN: Don't worry, my father likes blondes. I'll handle my mother.

TANYA: Which house is it?

WITTMAN: The white stucco, across the street, with the green awning.

TANYA: The one with the new Coupe de Ville in the driveway?

WITTMAN: What? Oh, no!

TANYA: And there's another one in front, and . . .

WITTMAN: Christ!

TANYA: . . . another one over there. What is it?

WITTMAN: I screwed up. It's the mah-jongg party. Every week for the last 20 years, mah-jongg. My mother and all her ex-chorus girl cronies, sitting around this big table. My father cuts out. He can't stand it. I don't blame him. I grew up with mah-jongg and I still don't know how to play it and I don't want to learn. *[Intensely.]* Women who don't have anything better to do but sit around all day playing mah-jongg, waiting to die. Their lives are over.

TANYA: *[Nervously.]* Maybe we should come back another time.

WITTMAN: No, come on, let's go. You're going to do great.

[Car doors opening, closing. Feet on walk. Street sounds (as above) up.]

[Interior theme; cross-fade with street sounds; up to establish and hold under monologue.]

WITTMAN: *[Interior.]* I should have sent a postcard: "Hi, folks. Met her on Saturday, married

her on Monday. More later. Love." My mother's bad enough by herself. Now we have to run the gantlet through the whole damn chorus line. "Always do the harder thing." Right? Wrong. Okay, remember what Gary Snyder said. He went to Japan to meditate for years. Now he can spend five minutes in the same room with his mother. Beat his record. O King of Monkeys, help me in this land of women.

[Interior theme cross fade to:]

[Sound of mah-jongg tiles, lots of ladies' voices come up (room sounds).]

[Screen door opening. Room sounds up.]

WITTMAN: Let me go first.

TANYA: Please.

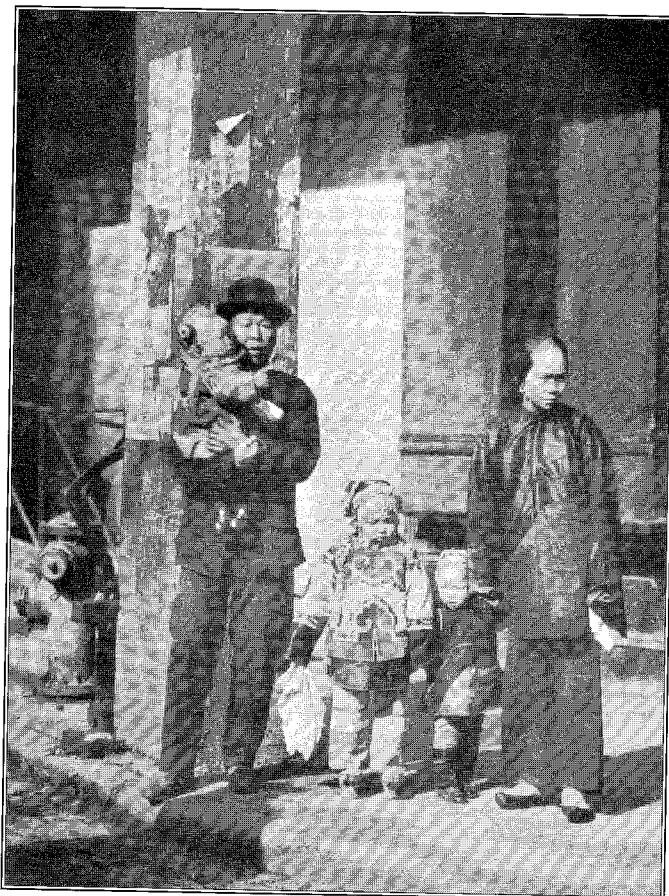
[Screen door closing.]

RUBY: Eeeek!!

[Aunties' following speeches overlap:]

LILAH: What is it, Ruby?

MAYDENE: What's wrong?



"Waiting for the [Cable] Cars," by Arnold Genthe, ca. 1900. The play "Mah Jongg" examines affection and tension within the twentieth-century Chinese American family. Actually, though the overwhelming majority of pioneer Chinese immigrants to California were men, family life has been a continuing theme within the Chinese ethnic community since its inception. Arnold Genthe, one of the state's great photographers and one of the pioneers of documentary photography, captured Chinese life—including relationships among women, children, and men—in pre-1906 San Francisco, in a series of images eventually published as *Pictures of Old Chinatown* (1908). CHS Library, San Francisco

DOLLY: What happened?

LILAH: Who's there?

RUBY: Eeeek!

WITTMAN: What's wrong, Ma? Haven't you ever seen —

RUBY: What have you done to yourself?

[Aunties' following speeches overlap:]

LILAH: You used to be such a beautiful boy!

MAYDENE: Too much hair, too hairy.

RUBY: You go shave. Shave it off. *Hock geen nay say. Gik say nay.* Galls you to death.

WITTMAN: No act, Ma.

RUBY: [Flat.] Don't say hello to your mother.

DOLLY: [Announcing to room.] Wit Man come to see his momma.

[Aunties' following speeches overlap:]

LILAH: Good boy.

DOLLY: Big boy.

MAYDENE: College grad, haw, Wit Man?

RUBY: Sit. Sit, you two.

LILAH: Wit Man, say hello to your Aunt Lilah.

WITTMAN: Hello, Aunt Lilah.

DOLLY: He was a cute biby.

WITTMAN: Hello, Aunt Dolly.

RUBY: Where I go wrong, I ask you? He was so clean cut. He used to be *soo mun*.

MAYDENE: Hairy face, fashion on a plate. [Accusingly.] You the one sent him to college, Ruby. Hello, Wit Man.

WITTMAN: Hello, Aunt Maydene.

RUBY: He takes a lot after his father, neh? So alike. Too alike. *Moong cha cha*.

DOLLY: [Calling.] Here's an empty chair down at this end, honey. Come meet Auntie Dolly.

WITTMAN: Go ahead, Tanya.

TANYA: OK. [Low.] What's *moong cha cha*:

WITTMAN: Stumbling around, talking to yourself.

DOLLY: What's your name, honey?

TANYA: Tanya.

DOLLY: Tan-ah. What a pretty name. Russian? Do you play, Tan-ah? I'll show you how to play. This is a very famous Chinese game, mah-jongg. Can you say "mah-jongg"?

MAYDENE: My name is Maydene Lam. Call me Maydene, dear.

TANYA: How do you do, Maydene?

DOLLY: I'm Dolly Chin, Tan-ah.

TANYA: How do you do, Dolly?

DOLLY: I've always loved your name, Maydene. Such a pretty stage name. Maydene Lam.

MAYDENE: Thank you, Dolly. Yes, isn't it delicious. There are four little girls named after me in the Valley.

DOLLY: What beautiful hair you have, Tan-ah. [Raises voice.] She's gorgeous, Wit Man! Beautiful hair! You are so fair. Isn't she fair, Maydene? [Confidential.] Myself, Tan-ah, I am a blond at heart.

[Room sounds cross-fade with surreal mah-jongg sounds.]

WITTMAN: [Interior.] Every one of them, jet black hair. Why do women as they get older have to have fixed hair? Maybe because of beauty fixed at 1945. These were the glamour girls of World War II.

[Surreal mah-jongg cross-fades with nightclub sounds.]
[Drum roll and rim shot.]

MC: Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Eddie Pond proudly welcomes back to the Kubla Khan, fresh from their triumphant coast-to-coast War Bond tour, the beautiful Wongettes, Chinese Blondes in a Blue Mood.

[Girls singing "Am I Blue" under Wittman's monologue.]

WITTMAN: Taking after the Soong Sisters and Anna Chennault, who married guys in uniform. Whenever these aunties' pictures show up in the local papers, it says, "the *lively* Madame Houston W.P. Fong," "the *beauteous* Madame Johnny Tom." Professional beauties. Especially the ones who had been Wongettes.

[Song ends to pretty good applause.]

MC: How about another round of applause for our lovely Wongettes?

WITTMAN: Everyone of them, jet-black *died* hair. [Nightclub sounds cross-fade with normal mah-jongg clacks, room sounds.]

[Aunties' following speeches overlap:]

LILAH: Ciao.

DOLLY: Poong.

MAYDENE: Kong.

RUBY: Eight ten thousands.

WITTMAN: Is Auntie Bessie coming, Mom?

RUBY: She's here. She and Auntie Maybo in the kitchen. [Side of mouth.] Who's the girl?

WITTMAN: My friend. A good friend.

RUBY: Serious?

WITTMAN: Sure.

RUBY: How serious?

WITTMAN: [Irritated.] Serious, OK?

RUBY: She's so rude; she's not talking to me.

WITTMAN: Mom.



"The Street of Painted Balconies," by Arnold Genthe, ca. 1900. In this photograph, Genthe caught the contradictions between the old and new worlds of the Chinese in San Francisco. Though probably born in the United States, the two young boys have retained the traditional pigtail, or queue, that signified the wearer's subservience to emperor and his intent to return to China. CHS Library, San Francisco

LILAH: Introduce you gal to you mom, young man.

WITTMAN: Yes, Auntie Lilah. *[Calls over.]* Hey, Tanya. This is my mother. Ruby Ah Sing. Ma, this is my *pahng-yow*, Tanya.

TANYA: Hi!

LILAH: You aren't growing up to be a heart-breaking man, are you, honey boy?

[Interior theme, hold under.]

WITTMAN: Speak for your own self, Auntie Lilah. Still raising hell at 75. I remember what you told me.

[Room sounds fade out, to smaller enclosed interior.]

LILAH: Now, Wit Man, honey, this is on the Q.T. This must not go further than this very room. Can I trust you?

WITTMAN: Yes, of course, Aunt Lilah.

LILAH: I am having a romance. With a 55-year-old *say-yun*, a Western man. He is so distinguished.

All his clothes are from Brooks Brothers. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday . . . *[Coy.]* you know. He is offering to divorce his wife for me, but I don't want to be married. Three times a week is quite enough.

[Room sounds fade up.]

MAYDENE: *[Raising voice.]* I tell you, Ruby. U.C. state-run public school don't teach them to present themselves socially. When my boy Ranceford comes out of Harvard, he can go anywhere.

RUBY: Anywhere, Maydene?

MAYDENE: You'd be surprising, Ruby. As I said to Mayling Soong, I-vee Leak be A-number-one-all-around. They learn how to make money *and* they learn to go around in society. Very complete.

WITTMAN: That's a true fact, Mom.

RUBY: At U.C. this one learned to grow hair long, grow rat beard, go out *bok gwai noi*. Mixing like cows and chickens.

LILAH: Hair's a big city fashion, isn't it, honey boy?

WITTMAN: Yes, Aunt Lilah.

LILAH: It's a big city fashion, Ruby. But you still got one matinee idol under the hair. I remember when you were yay high. I used to change your diapers. You were deh, Wit Man. *[To Tanya.]* He was so deh.

RUBY: Cut it off, Wit Man. Cut it off. I'll pay you.

WITTMAN: Just. Just.

[Room sounds cross-fade to surreal mah-jongg sounds. Establish and hold under.]

WITTMAN: Just lay off me. Let me be. And let me live. Calm down, Wittman, let them play. Be three years old again. Watch. *[Beat—childlike, setting it for the first time.]*

[Surreal mah-jongg fade up a little.]

WITTMAN: Their outspread fingers with red nails and rings of gold and jade push and turn the tiles in wheels of bones and plastic, clockwise and counterclockwise.

DOLLY: You in luck today, Maydene.

WITTMAN: The sound of fortune is clack, clack, clack.

MAYDENE: Not lucky like you, Dolly.

WITTMAN: They build little Great Walls and tear them down.

DOLLY: *Aiya!*

WITTMAN: Mom fans a tile like putting out a match—hot, the red dragon. Now comes the green dragon. Dangerous. One, two, three bamboo. *Mah jeuk* birds all in a row.

[Surreal mah-jongg cross-fade to room sounds, as above.]

LILAH: Wit Man, your mama one cutthroat. You working hard, Wit Man?

WITTMAN: I've been fired, Auntie Lilah.

RUBY: Fired! Fired!

WITTMAN: It's OK, Ma. I didn't like the job anyway.

RUBY: Four years college. What are we to do?

LILAH: He'll get a job again, Ruby. Nowadays they try out jobs, then settle down.

DOLLY: Wit Man be smart. He'll be rich one of these days.

RUBY: He read books when he was three years old. Now look at him. *A bum-how.*

[Aunties' following speeches overlap:]

LILAH: Don't worry.

DOLLY: He's one good boy.

LILAH: He be nice and tall.

DOLLY: He'll turn out.

LILAH: And so-o-o much talent. Too much talent. He got upbringing, Ruby; you gave him upbringing he cannot lose. He got foundation.

DOLLY: He's clean, too. Most beardies are dirty. And *bok gwai*.

RUBY: That means "white," Tan-ah. Does he eat regular?

TANYA: Sure. He eats.

[Swinging kitchen door. Mabel's voice approaches.]

MABEL: Oooh, Wit Man, hello. You look like one beatnik.

WITTMAN: Hi, Auntie Maybo.

MAYDENE: Wit Man been fired, Maybo.

MABEL: You need a job, Wit Man? I got one gig for you, dear. You come to Florida and do my revue.

WITTMAN: You still doing your revue, Auntie Maybo?

MABEL: Yeah, I do revue. You come, eh, Wit Man. We need a fella in the act.

WITTMAN: In Florida, you dance, you sing?

MABEL: No-o-o. I standup comedy. My gals sing and dance. I train them. Miss Chinatown, 1959, 1962, and 1963, all in my act. All my gals queen of the prom, court princess at least. I teach them. Mothers of junior high gals say to me, "Start her on her make-up, Maybo." I teach them hair and dress. They do not go out in blue jeans or with no gloves.

[Room sounds cross-fade with nightclub sounds.]

WITTMAN: *[Interior.]* Yeah, I've met some of the "trained gals." They look like young Auntie Mabels: their hair in beehives, sausage curls hanging over the shoulder, glued-on eyelashes like a pair of dead spiders. She won some beauty contests herself umpteen years ago. Went on to fan-dance, almost top billing, with Miss Toyette Mar, the Chinese Sophie Tucker, and Mr. Stanley Toy, the Fred Astaire of Chinatown, and Prince Gum Low, and Mr. Kwai Tak Hong, the Chinese Will Rogers, who also danced flamenco. *[Awe.]* Your tits, Auntie Mabel, were the very first tits I ever did see. *[Beat.]* Scared the daylight out of me.

[Drum roll and rim shot.]

MC: Ladies and gentlemen, Andy Wong's Sky Room is proud to present Miss Mabel Foo Yee, the Chinese Fortune Cookie.

[Orchestra plays "Limehouse Blues," (40s-sounding recording).]

WITTMAN: The house lights go out and she comes through the curtain into a red spot. She slinks around the dance floor, snaking her arms and

legs like Greta Garbo and Anna Mae Wong, legs tangoing out of her split dress. Now the light shrinks to head size and the spot holds her face. Chopsticks in her hair. False eyelashes blink hard and the light goes out. She runs around with incense sticks, writing red script in the air. Red lights flash on. The front of her dress breaks away.

[Big high-pitched brassy gong. Twice.]

WITTMAN: Lights out.

[Same gong once.]

WITTMAN: Lights on. Auntie Mabel stands with arms and naked tits raised at the ceiling. I look hard for two seconds; the lights go out.

[Same gong once.]

WITTMAN: Lights on. She kneels with wrists together, tits at ease, eyelashes downcast.

[Big brass finish.]

WITTMAN: Lights out. The End.

[Normal room sounds fade up.]

MABEL: Wit Man, Listen to you Auntie Maybo. Good you get fired from demeaning employment. You get back into show biz, honey. You a good type, Wit Man.

WITTMAN: No thanks, Auntie Maybo.

MABEL: Come on. Sometimes we play Reno, North Shore Lake Tahoe.

WITTMAN: Auntie Maybo? I like Shakespeare.

MAYDENE: You snob, Wit Man. You will be hurt and jobless.

RUBY: No use, Maybo; like his father. *Moong cha*

cha. [To Maydene.] Maydene, how is Gail these days?

MAYDENE: Oh my Gail. She is so smart, I hope she won't marry somebody second-rate. The professors gave her a personal invitation to attend Stanford University and pay her to go there. You know S.A.T.? Best S.A.T. in California. Ten thousand points. Her teachers say they never taught a more intelligent girl.

RUBY: You still not get Gail married yet?

[Swinging kitchen door. Bessie's voice approaches.]

BESSIE: Wit Man! Good to see you! Nice beard!

WITTMAN: Hi, Auntie Bessie.

BESSIE: I knew you'd be here today.

WITTMAN: How?

BESSIE: I dreamed about you last night. You were doing a dance for me, making little bows. How come you're not introducing me? Who's this beauty?

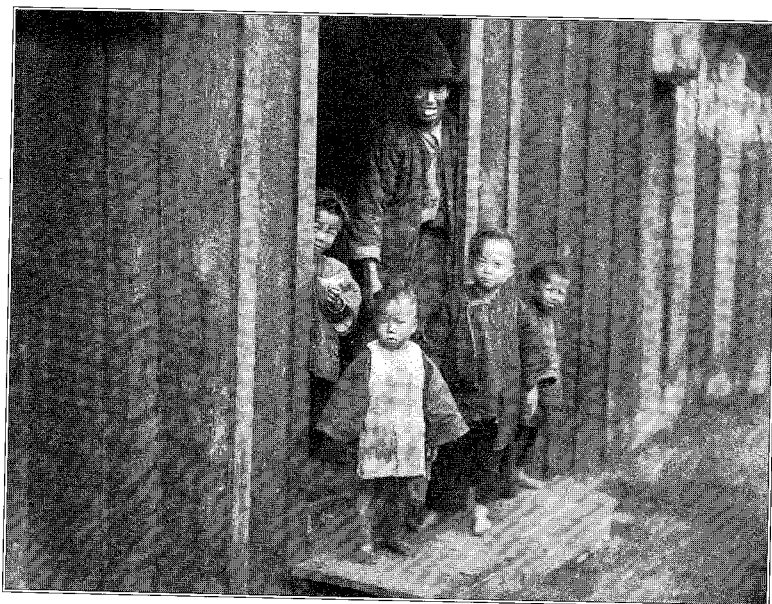
WITTMAN: Sorry, Auntie Bessie. This is my *pahng-yow*, Tanya. Tanya, Auntie Bessie.

TANYA: Hello.

BESSIE: Hello, Tanya. Did Wit Man tell you he's one great soft shoe? Come on, Wit Man, do some soft shoe, huh?

WITTMAN: No, thanks, Auntie Bessie.

BESSIE: [Sings.] "I won't dance. Don't ask me. I won't dance. Don't ask me. I won't dance, monsieur, with yo-o-ou." [Flirting.] Not even for your favorite Aunt, honey boy?



"Chinese Family, Monterey, California," by Carleton E. Watkins, ca. 1880. Living conditions for Chinese in small towns were often more primitive than in the large and complex San Francisco Chinatown. CHS Library, San Francisco

WITTMAN: [Soft.] Ssh, Auntie Bessie . . . The rest of them are going to be jealous.

[Chinese "Oklahoma" music or distorted friendly party sounds up to establish and hold under monologue.]

WITTMAN: But it's true. My favorite. She had played Laurie in the Chinese Optimists Club production of "Oklahoma." She wore a white lace Laurie dress with a half-dozen petticoats, her hair dressed out with a wig of black ringlets. She kept her stage make-up on for the cast party. I stood beside her at the group sing around the piano. Up close I could see her powdery wrinkles; but still, I had fallen in love.

[Last cue cross-fade with room sounds.]

WITTMAN: Hey, Auntie Bessie, do you still say "YOW!"? [Prompting her, chanting.] "Okla-Okla-Okla—"

BESSIE: [Sings.] "And when we sa-a-ay 'Yow!' 'Yow! A-yip-I-oh-I- yay, /We're only sayin' / You're doin' fine, Oklahoma, Oklahoma, O.K.!"

[Applause.] [Cries of] "Good Bessie," "More!"

BESSIE: [Sings.] "Don't sigh and gaze at me. Your sighs are so like mine . . . uh . . . [Regroups.] Don't laugh at my jokes too much . . ."

WITTMAN: [In gruff "curley" style] Who laughs at yer jokes?

BESSIE: "People will say we're in love. Don't . . . Uh, rusty, try Wit.

TANYA: [Singing, low.] "Don't dance all night with me . . ."

[Aunties' voices overlap.]

LILAH: Oh, Tan-ah can sing.

MAYDENE: Good.

DOLLY: Help out.

BESSIE: [Joining with Tanya] "Till the stars fade from above. They'll see it's all right with me . . ."

WITTMAN AND ALL AUNTIES: [Joining in.] "People will say we're in love."

[Applause.]

[Over applause.]

LILAH: [Sly.] You in love, Wittman, hmmm?

[Aunties' voices overlap:]

LILAH: Ho-la.

DOLLY: Good, Bessie, Good, Tan-ah.

MAYDENE: Encore.

MABEL: Bessie as good as ever.

BESSIE: Thank you, Tanya.

TANYA: Thank you, Auntie Bessie. You have a beautiful voice.

BESSIE: Wit Man, you never said she's in show business.

WITTMAN: She's not, Auntie Bessie. She's an assistant claims adjustor.

[Chairs being pushed back, footsteps, signaling intermission in mah-jongg.]

DOLLY: Tan-ah, I tell you, that voice of Bessie's helped buy an airplane for World War II.

MAYDENE: And the rest of us too, we were stars. We put on many shows, and so many people paid to watch us dance and sing, we raised enough money to buy an airplane.

BESSIE: We toured nation wide. We had the most active chapter of the Association of Vaudeville Artistes. We had a painting party, and painted our airplane—a Chinese flag and an American flag—red, white, and blue.

RUBY: [Getting into the mood.] That's right, Tan-ah. Auntie Bessie's brother flew it to China, and became a Flying Tiger, and is now a pilot for China Airlines.

TANYA: But Mrs.—uh—Ruby, you mean you raised all that money yourselves?

MABEL: [Naughty and sexy.] Not the only thing we raised, honey.

[All aunties laugh.]

MABEL: [Naughty.] We danced the Pants Dance of the Nations, our big hit. I was Miss France.

TANYA: What?

LILAH: Tan-ah darling, we wore undies with the flags of the allies on them. I was Miss Great Britain.

BESSIE: I was Miss Belgium. And Maybo was . . .

MABEL: I was Miss China.

MAYDENE: I was Miss Finlandia.

DOLLY: I was Miss . . . uh, you know . . . Down Under?

RUBY: [Dampening it.] You know, of course, Wit Man, who your mother was.

WITTMAN: Yes, Mom.

RUBY: [Grandly.] I was Miss Russia, Tan-ah.

LILAH: [Sings to tune of "Volga Boatman"] Yo-ho-HEAVE-ho. You see, Tan-ah, we each did a solo to honor our brave allies. [Sings to tune of "God Save the King"] "King Georgie had a date. He stayed out very late."

ALL AUNTIES: "God save the King."

LILAH: [Continuing song.] "Queen Mary paced the floor. King George came in at four. She met him at the door . . ."

ALL AUNTIES: [Finishing song.] "God save the King!"

MABEL: And our grand finale—everybody down on her back, legs making “V” for Victory.
[All aunties laugh.]
WITTMAN: *[Hastily.]* I’m really hungry. Come on, Tanya.
[Footsteps. Kitchen door.]
[Aunties start on “I’d like to get you on a slow boat to China.”]
[Kitchen door closes at “China.” Fade aunties, other room way down.]
TANYA: God, they’re really sassy. I thought for a second they were going to do it—get down on their backs, and—hey, you’re blushing.
WITTMAN: What did I tell you? They’re embarrassing. They just love to have any . . .
TANYA: *[Interrupting.]* You told me they were “waiting to die.” *[Digging in.]* I think they’re doing fine, enjoying life. And they’re not so old. Your mother and Lilah and Dolly—a lot of them are still pretty.
WITTMAN: Well, yea, maybe.
TANYA: *[Changing tactics.]* And what about Bessie? I saw the way you were looking at her. I don’t mean I’m jealous, but . . .
WITTMAN: Okay, you’re right. She’s really . . . something.
TANYA: I think they are all . . . something.
WITTMAN: Maybe you’re right.
TANYA: And they really love you.
WITTMAN: *[Understanding.]* Yea, they really do.
TANYA: Wittman, what does *pahng-yow* mean?
WITTMAN: *[Beat.]* Do you want a real short tour of this place? My favorite room.
TANYA: Yes, but what does . . .
WITTMAN: Come on, then.
[Under following speech, 2 sets of footsteps down hall.]
WITTMAN: I have a Granny. She hates mah-jongg too. On game days, my father drops her off at a friend’s house on his way to the gambling hall. I’m sure she wouldn’t mind your seeing her room.
[Footsteps stop. Door knob.]
WITTMAN: Careful. I’ll go first.
TANYA: It’s dark. What is that, all over everything? God, it’s a spider web!
WITTMAN: No. Wait.
[Window shade going up.]
TANYA: It’s not spiderwebs. It’s like snowflakes. Sewn together, like lace, floating over everything.
WITTMAN: Watch.

[Window opening, outdoor sounds as before.]
TANYA: It’s dancing. Beautiful. Is it lace?
WITTMAN: String. She tats string into these circles and spirals, web daisies. Be right back.
[Footsteps, water in sink. Splashing shaving sounds low and hold under sequence.]
TANYA: *[Laughing, calls.]* These pictures on the bureau, you?
WITTMAN: *[From bathroom.]* Yeah. The sumo wrestler, I was about six or so; the Indian costume, about the same time.
TANYA: Is this you too, with the gauze bandages and the dark glasses.
WITTMAN: That was my Invisible Man phase. I made my folks drive me around like that on Sunday afternoons.
TANYA: What’s this one, with all the grease paint? Are you supposed to be a monkey?
WITTMAN: Not “Supposed to be.” I am.
TANYA: *[Laughs.]* That’s true. Hey, what are you doing? Can I come in?
[Footsteps to bathroom.]
WITTMAN: Sure. Almost done.
[Feet stop.]
TANYA: You’re shaving it off!
[Water off.]
WITTMAN: *[Cheery.]* I’m coming clean, Tanya. The smooth-faced groom. Now Mom’ll scream about me not being able to make up my mind. How do I look?
TANYA: You look clean-cut and very sexy.
[Two sets of feet go back into bedroom.]
TANYA: Your grandmother was in show business, too.
WITTMAN: No. Why do you say that?
TANYA: That set model on the dresser.
WITTMAN: Oh, no. Come on, I’ll show you. It’s really what I brought you here to see.
TANYA: Isn’t it a stage designer’s model?
WITTMAN: No, Tanya. This is my family’s village. Our memory village.
TANYA: *[Amazed.]* Oh, look, how precise. Everything numbered, labeled, the rungs on the ladders, the steps., These toy pigs, numbered.
WITTMAN: Here, in the plaza, this well is where Gramma fetched water, where she dropped her jug and the men laughed. This is the music building.
TANYA: These trees, . . .
WITTMAN: . . . lichees, . . .



"Chinese Salvation Army," by Arnold Genthe, ca. 1900. CHS Library, San Francisco

TANYA: . . . numbered.

WITTMAN: Thirty-three . . . Twenty belonged to my great-great-uncle, thirteen to my grandfather.

TANYA: Look, the streets, the paths, numbered. I don't understand, Wittman. Why is everything so carefully numbered?

WITTMAN: Because everyone who claimed to have come from here studied this model, memorized it, and described it to Immigration. "How many houses in your village?" "How many lichee trees does your village have?" They asked these questions and compared the answers to the answers of those first frightened immigrants. They wanted to catch us in mistakes and send us back. So we created this village, frozen in time. It's a model of something that doesn't exist anymore really, a memory village. If Immigration ever raided this room, looking for illegals, they could take this model as evidence and deport us. This is it. My land. I am a genie who's escaped from the bottle city of Kandor. I've told you immigration secrets. You can blackmail me. And make me small again, and stopper me up. But if I don't have someone to tell these secrets to, where am I? *[Pause.]* I love you, Tanya.

TANYA: And I love you, Wittman. Thank you for taking me into your family like this. I'll never tell.

WITTMAN: *[Beat.]* Shall we rejoin the ladies, *oi-yun*.

TANYA: What does that mean, Wittman. That's not what you called me in there. You called me . . .

WITTMAN: "*Pahng-yow*?"

TANYA: That's it! What does "*pahng-yow*" mean? You called me that, to your mother and Aunt Bessie. It doesn't mean "wife," does it?

WITTMAN: No, it means "friend."

TANYA: You haven't told them . . .

WITTMAN: Don't worry. I said I'm coming clean, and I am. Let's go show my Mom. Maybe she'll ask me to glue it back on.

TANYA: But what did you call me just now? That other word?

WITTMAN: "*Oi-yun*." It means "beloved." Let's go show Mom.

[Swinging door; mah-jongg and room sounds up.]

WITTMAN: Mom, what do you think?

RUBY: What do I think about what? You eat enough, Wit Man? You looking skinny.

[Movement, chairs.]

[Aunties' voices overlap:]

DOLLY: Wit Man, stay.

MABEL: Don't go.

LILAH: Bye, Tan-ah.

MAYDENE: You going?

BESSIE: Kiss goodbye, Wit Man.

RUBY: Where you going so fast, young man?

WITTMAN: Going on our honeymoon, Mom.

RUBY: Your what?

WITTMAN: Yeah, we're married, Mom. Bye.

RUBY: Eeeek!

[Aunties' voices overlap:]

MABEL: What?

MAYDENE: What'd he say?

DOLLY: They married.

MAYDENE: Who?

TANYA: Bye Ruby, bye Bessie, Bye Maybo, Dolly, Lilah, everybody.

[Screen door, running feet.]

[Aunties' voices overlap:]

MABEL: 'Bye.

DOLLY: Congratulations!

MABEL: Take care of her, Wit Man.

MAYDENE: They're married?

RUBY: *[Over the hubbub:]* What did I do wrong?

[Fade out room. Fade up outside noises as before.]

WITTMAN: Come on, *oi-yun*. Hurry. We're late!

TANYA: Late for what? Where are we going?

WITTMAN: To the gambling hall. Now you're going to meet my father and *his* friends.

TANYA: Terrific!

[Car doors, engine starting, car pulling away.]

[Original sound track recording, "Oklahoma," song: "People Will Say We're in Love." Include the line "Don't please my folks too much."] CHS

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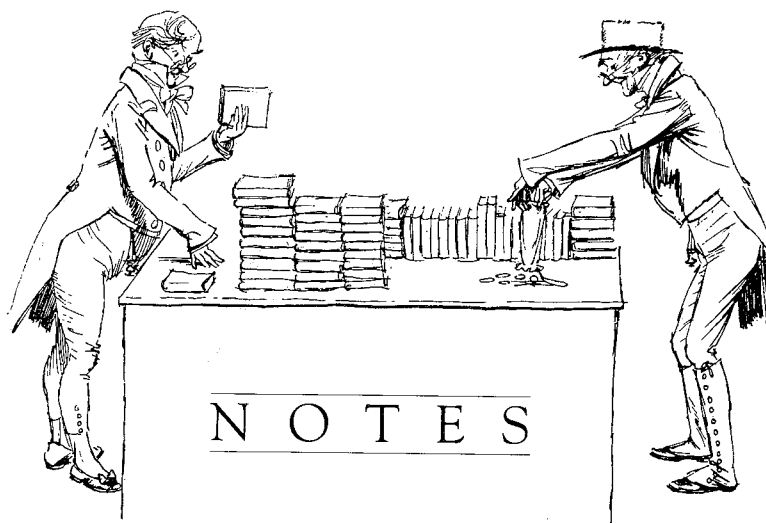
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HASLAM, "Literary California," pp 188-195.

Selected Readings

Two literary histories by Franklin Walker,

San Francisco's Literary Frontier (1939) and *A Literary History of Southern California* (1950), offer excellent starting points for an examination of our state's literature. Also highly recommended is Lawrence Clark Powell's *California Classics* (1971), as are Kevin Starr's *Americans and the California Dream* (1973) and *Inventing the Dream* (1985). Interesting but less satisfactory because the writer strains too hard to force California into his deductive paradigm is David Wyatt's *The Fall into Eden* (1986).

Among anthologies, John and La Ree Caughey's *California Heritage* (1962) is fine, if dated, and much the same can be said of W. Storrs Lee's *California: A Literary Chronicle* (1968). More recent is Gary Soto's lauded anthology *California Childhood* (1988). Now out of print, *California Heartland* (1978), edited by James D. Houston and myself, remains the best collection of Central Valley writing. Floyd Salas has edited a selection of the Bay Area's best work, *Close to Home* (1986), and for the past several years an annual *Southern California Anthology* has been published at the University of Southern California.

Articles on California writers and writing are listed in the annual bibliography published in the winter number of *Western American Literature* from Utah State University.

FINE, "The Los Angeles Novel," pp. 196-201.

Selected Readings

Los Angeles in Fiction: a Collection of Original Essays, edited by David Fine (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), contains a dozen essays on Los Angeles writers from the 1930s to the present. My introduction to the volume expands the ideas presented

in this paper. The collection contains first-rate essays by scholars on West and Chandler, as well as more recent writers. *Tycoons and Locusts: A Regional Look at Hollywood Fiction in the 1930s*, by Walter Wells (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), is an excellent study of such writers as West, Chandler, Cain, McCoy, and Fitzgerald. For critical and biographical studies of West, see Jay Martin, *Nathanael West: the Art of his Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), James F. Light, *Nathanael West, an Interpretive Study* (2nd edition, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), and David Madden, ed., *Nathanael West: the Cheaters and the Cheated* (Deland, Florida: Everett/Edwards, 1973). For critical and biographical studies of Chandler, see Frank McShane, *The Life of Nathanael West* (New York: Dutton, 1976), Jerry Speir, *Raymond Chandler* (New York: Ungar, 1981), and Miriam Gross, ed., *The World of Raymond Chandler* (New York: A. and W. Publishers, 1977).

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3. William Saroyan, "Seventy Thousand Assyrians," in *The Saroyan Special* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944).
4. William Saroyan, *Here Comes, There Goes, You Know Who* (New York: Simon and

- Schuster, 1961), 125. Subsequent page references to this work appear in the text.
5. See Margaret Bedrosian, "William Saroyan and the Family Matter," *MELUS Journal*, No. 4 (1982): 13-24. Saroyan's attitudes toward his family, his ethnic group, and his home were ultimately inextricable from one another. Examining one inevitably involves the others.
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 7. Quoted in Lawrence Lee and Barry Gifford, *Saroyan* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 171.
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 10. For example, full-time earners included in a pension plan declined 8 percent, those included in an employer's group health plan declined 8 percent, and those whose employer helped pay for group health declined 7 percent. In general, part-time workers have much lower levels of benefit reciprocity, and these low levels have become even lower during the 1980s.
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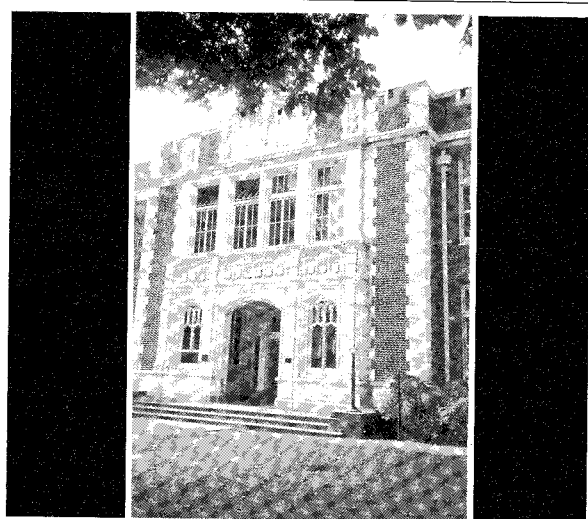
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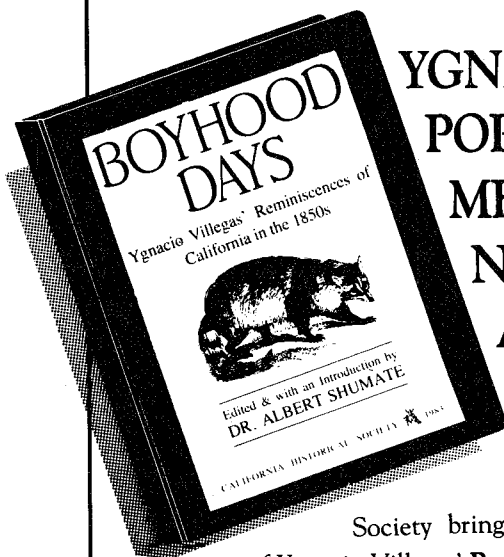
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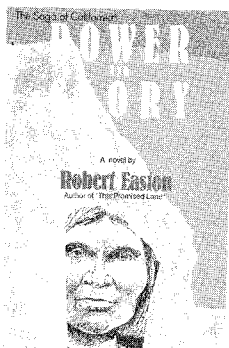
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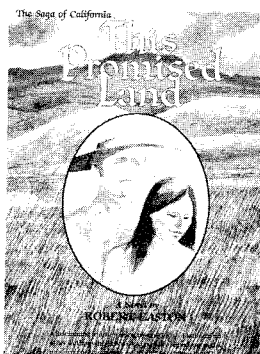
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3. Frequency of Issue Quarterly	3A. No. of Issues Published Annually Four	3B. Annual Subscription Price \$40.00						
4. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Street, City, County, State and ZIP+4 Code (Not printer)) 2090 Jackson Street San Francisco, CA 94109-2896								
5. Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters or General Business Office of the Publisher (Not printer) 2090 Jackson Street San Francisco, CA 94109-2896								
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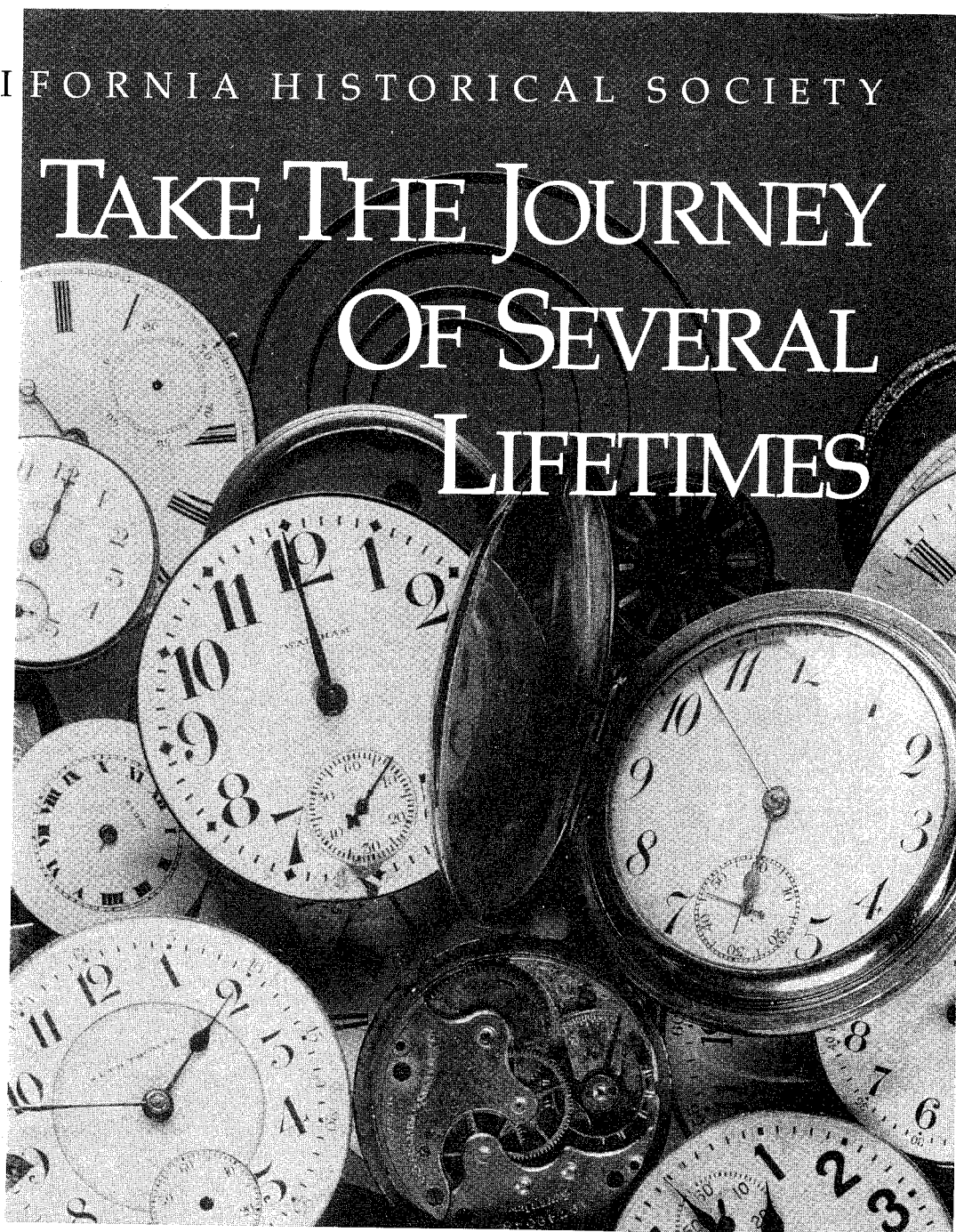
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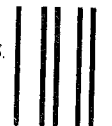
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LC 75-640289/ISSN 0612-2897
Second-class postage paid at San Francisco.
Publication number 084180

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